SRI LANKAN YOUTH

Challenges and Responses

Edited by

S. T. Hettige
Markus Mayer

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
Colombo Office

in collaboration with

South Asia Institute (SAI)
University of Heidelberg

and

Development Studies Institute
University of Colombo (DSIUC)

July 2002

FES PUBLICATION 50

SRI LANKAN YOUTH
Challenges and Responses

Edited by : S. T. Hettige/Markus Mayer

Cover Design : Nalin Balasuriya

The views and ideas expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the DSIUC, SAI and FES.

ISBN 955–607-036-2

Publisher: FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG 4, Adams Avenue, Colombo 4
Sri Lanka

website: www.fessrilanka.org

e-mail: office@fessrilanka.org

Contents

Preface

The articles in this volume provide a critical analysis of problems of youth in Sri Lanka at the turn of the 21st century. Given the enormous significance of the youth constituency in more recent socio-political developments in Sri Lanka, the focus on youth is certainly justified. As a collection of essays dealing with challenges and responses of youth in Sri Lanka, I notice three important distinctions in this volume.

First, the interdisciplinary breadth of this volume is remarkable. It brings together sociological, anthropological, demographic, economics, political science and educational perspectives relating to youth issues in the country. This is a welcome trend that can potentially facilitate not only a sound understanding of various dimensions of the youth problem, but also a cross-fertilization of sectoral approaches (i.e. education, employment generation, vocational training, empowerment) towards addressing youth problems.

Second, articles in this volume make a conscious effort to situate youth problems within socio-economic and political environment within the country and the larger global environment. In that sense contributions to this volume have a significance that goes beyond a particular time and space and disciplinary boundaries.

Third, while this volume deals with much the same problems and challenges of youth that received increased attention in research as well as in policy and program formulation since the first JVP uprising in southern Sri Lanka in 1971, there is a freshness and greater analytical rigor in the analysis pursued as data from multiple sources are subjected to critical scrutiny by a team of well known researchers.

This volume will be an invaluable resource to social scientists and others interested in Sri Lanka society in general as well as to youth-oriented service providers in Sri Lanka.

Kalinga Tudor Silva
Executive Director, Centre for Poverty Analysis
Professor of Sociology, University of Peradeniya

FOREWORD

This publication is the result of a three - year effort invested in the realization and data analysis of an island- wide National Youth Survey in Sri Lanka covering nearly 3000 households, including the North and East of the country. The quantitative research was complemented by qualitative case studies about specific segments of youth. The survey was a joint undertaking involving UNDP and six Sri Lankan and German institutions, namely: the Centre for Anthropological and Sociological Studies of the University of Colombo (CASS), the Program "Improving Capacities for Poverty Research" (IMCAP) at the Development Studies Institute of the University of Colombo (DSIUC), the South Asia Institute of the University of Heidelberg (SAI), the Goethe Institute / Inter Nationes, the Jaffna Rehabilitation Project of the GTZ and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). The survey was inspired by the so-called "Shell Youth Study", a comprehensive periodic research report on young people in Germany sponsored by the Shell Company.

The immediate aim of the National Youth Survey conducted in Sri Lanka in 1999 / 2000 was to collect up to-date and reliable information about opinions, values, perceptions, concerns, grievances and aspirations of the young generation in Sri Lanka. Further, it aimed at the identification and better understanding of the main problems young people are facing, and of their own potential, commitment and ideas to solve them. But the survey has not been conceived as just an academic exercise, without political relevance and without a concrete impact. It is intended to provide a scientific database to assist policy - makers and development organizations. So, the ultimate aim of the survey is to make a contribution towards the improvement of policies and development initiatives targeting at youth.

In order to avoid the survey data to be interpreted in a simplistic way, some distinguished academics were invited to prepare papers on specific key topics covered by the survey, such as youth and politics, youth and conflict, youth and employment, and youth and education. Their papers are based on a critical in - depth analysis of the survey data and are enriched with their own research results. In addition, in one of the papers in the present volume, quantitative and qualitative research results obtained in Sri Lanka are compared with a similar research experience made in India.

The rationale for the effort does not need much explanation. The two insurrections of the Sinhalese youth in the South, and the ethno-nationalist or the so called Tamil conflict in the North-East, have to a great extent their roots in unfulfilled expectations of the young, in a mismatch between aspirations and opportunities of juveniles. While the problems which have given rise to these uprisings have not yet been addressed in a satisfactory manner, yet another conflict seems to be in the making: the youth survey and other sources provide clear indications of growing dissatisfaction and frustration among Tamil plantation youth, a dissatisfaction with the State, but also with their own political, religious and trade union leadership. This discontent could lead to another serious crisis, to another violent conflict of radicalized youth if not addressed in time and in an adequate manner.

It is not the first time in Sri Lanka that specific recommendations for policies, strategies and actions in favor of young people are being worked out. Already in 1989, a Presidential Commission on Youth was appointed with the mandate to examine the causes of youth discontent, disquiet and unrest and to recommend remedial measures to discourage these attitudes and fulfill legitimate youth needs and aspirations. Not only did the comprehensive report presented by that commission in March 1990 focus on youth problems and youth policy in a narrow

sense of the terms, but it also comprised a great number of constructive and plausible recommendations for wider changes in society and for effective democratization of the State.

The members of the Presidential Commission on Youth especially recommended a reversal of the over- politicization of society, a control of the misuse and abuse of political power and a prevention of arbitrary political interferences in public institutions. Moreover, they advocated profound reforms in such priority areas like education and employment, which were considered necessary pre conditions for meaningful youth development and for integration and participation of youth in society and mainstream politics. The commission also emphasized that "any recommendations for future action are, in the ultimate analysis, conditional upon early return of the country to a climate of peace and normalcy." Most of the recommendations presented 12 years ago are far from being outdated. They remain valid to date. But, unfortunately, they are yet to be implemented.

Hopefully, the National Youth Survey and this publication will give new life to the debate on youth problems and youth policy in Sri Lanka. The young generation should be actively involved in the design and implementation of youth policy. Youth policy should not consider the youth as passive recipients of assistance, but it should offer young people a space for self- determination, self- organization and self- realization. Statism and paternalism in both ideology and institutions have made many young persons behave in a passive manner being entirely dependent on government agencies or NGOs and their programs. This is not desirable. What is required is a paradigm shift: youth policy should aim at enabling young people to develop their capacities and initiatives. It should empower them for self – help, to develop their full potentialities. And, since youth policy is a crucial national issue, it should be accepted as a collective, long term political task requiring a consensual approach transcending narrow partisan politics.

In his message to mark the International Youth Day on August 12, 2001, Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations, made the following remarks which are certainly relevant for Sri Lanka as well: *"Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies."*

Dietmar Kneitschel, Resident Representative FES

List of Contributors

S. T. HETTIGE is Senior Professor of Sociology attached to the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

MARKUS MAYER is Coordinator of the Improving Capacities for Poverty Research Program (IMCAP) of the Development Studies Institute, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

W. D. LAKSHMAN is Senior Professor of Economics attached to the Department of Economics, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

CHANDRA GUNAWARDENA is Professor of Sociology and Dean of Faculty of Arts, Open University of Sri Lanka

LAKSIRI FERNANDO is Senior Lecturer attached to the Department of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

SUBRATA K. MITRA is Professor of Political Science, Head of the Department of Political Science and Director of South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany

MIKE ENSKAT is former Lecturer of Political Science attached to the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany

KARSTEN FREY is a Ph.D. candidate attached to the Department of Political Science, South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany

C. Y. THANGARAJAH is a Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology attached to the Eastern University, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

NATIONAL RESEARCH TEAM

Prof. S. T. Hettige, **Team Leader**, *Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo*
Dr. Markus Mayer, *Program Co-ordinator, IMCAP, DSIUC, University of Colombo*
Mr. Premakumara de Silva, *Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Colombo*
Mr. Nishara Fernando, *Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Colombo*

SURVEY SUPPORT TEAM

Ms. Jayanthi Ranasinghe, *Project Co-ordinator, CASS, University of Colombo*

Ms. Jinali Chandrika, *Training of interviewers & support of analysis, CASS, University of Colombo*
Mr. A. Robinson, *Survey assistance Northern Province & support of analysis, CASS, Uni. of Colombo*

Mr. Jayasinghe, *Training of interviewers &statistical consultancy, CASS, University of Colombo*
Mr. Dharmadasa Paranagama, *Support for statistical analysis, CASS, University of Colombo*
Ms. Ayoma Abeysuriya, *Qualitative case study analysis, SAI, Sri Lanka Office*

Ms. Anula Ratnayake, *Coding assistance, CASS, University of Colombo*
Ms. Gowry Palaniyapan, *Survey assistance Plantation Sector, CASS, University of Colombo*

Mr Anton Piyaratne, *Survey Field Co-ordinator, CASS, University of Colombo*
Mr. Sagara Chandrasekara, *Survey Field Co-ordinator, CASS, University of Colombo*

NORTH AND EAST TEAM

Dr. C. Y. Thangarajah, *Dean, Faculty of Arts, Eastern University, Batticaloa*
Dr. N. Shanmugalingam, *Head, Department of Sociology, University of Jaffna*
Mr. N Logeswaran, *Dean, Faculty of Management and Commerce, Eastern University, Batticaloa*
Mr. E. R. Richard, *Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Jaffna*
Ms. Doreen Arulanandam, *Department of Sociology, University of Jaffna*
Ms. Bahirathy, *Department of Sociology, University of Jaffna*

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATORS

Prof. Hans-Georg Bohle, *Department of Geography, SAI, University of Heidelberg*
Dr. Mike Enskat, *Department of Political Science, SAI, University of Heidelberg*
Prof. S. Mitra, *Department of Political Science, SAI, University of Heidelberg*
Dr. Elvira Granner, *Department of Geography, SAI, University of Heidelberg*

CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Mr. Tilak Gunawardana, *United Nations Development Program (UNDP)*
Mr. Dietmar Kneitschel, *Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (FES)*
Mr. D. L. Kumaradasa, *Ministry of Youth Affairs*
Mr. P. Maddugoda, *Ministry of Youth Affairs*
Ms. Rachel Perera, *United Nations Development Program (UNDP*
Mr. Manfred Broenner, *Director, German Cultural Institute (GCI)*
Ms. Christine Bigdon, *Resident Representative, South Asia Institute (SAI)*
Mr. Eberhard Halbach, *Team Leader, Jaffna Rehabilitation Project (JRP)-GTZ*

Youth and Youth Research in Sri Lanka: Introductory Remarks

S.T. Hettige/ Markus Mayer

Sri Lankan youth have figured prominently in the country's post-independence political landscape, particularly since the early 1970's. This is understandable because rapid population growth in the country since the mid 1940's coupled with progressive social policies led to the emergence of a vast youthful population with high educational attainment and aspirations for social mobility. The democratic parliamentary system of government that encouraged political pluralism since independence in 1948 has been instrumental in mobilising increasingly politically conscious youth to play an active part in the country's politics, particularly under the "youth wings" of the major parties that came forward.

Sri Lanka witnessed an increasing radicalisation of its youth constituencies at least since the late 1960's, particularly under the direct influence of the two major leftist parties in the country, namely the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Sri Lankan Communist Party. Both these parties with a strong urban working class support base, agitated for radical social change and mobilised popular support around socialist goals. Their initial success in building up a massive support base in the country was later thwarted by the emergence of the more moderate, reformist Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) with which the Marxist parties joined to form coalition governments since the early 1960's. These developments appeared to have frustrated more radical youth belonging to the Leftist parties, eventually persuading them to form their own parties. The emergence of the JVP (People's Liberation Front) in the late 60's that led to a large scale mobilisation of Sri Lankan youth for armed struggle aimed at capturing state power. Since then,

Sri Lanka has witnessed not only a second wave of insurgency led by the JVP in the late 1980's but also a major anti-state, separatist movement among Tamil youth in the Northern region.

Globalisation, Economic Change and Politics of Segmentation

The persisting or even widening gap between the developed countries on one hand and developing countries on the other has not prevented the establishment of further linkages between the two sets of countries under the influence of diverse forces of globalisation. Abandonment of protectionist, state-led development policies in these countries, coupled with the IT revolution has facilitated the flow of consumer goods, capital, cultural goods, labour and ideas across national boundaries. Many people, both well-to-do as well as poor, tend to seek livelihood opportunities, away from the native places, in larger cities and foreign countries. Such migration is as much encouraged by sheer economic need as by newly acquired consumer aspirations.

The adoption of liberal economic policies has led to significant changes in the economy and the social structure. Relative significance of rural income sources, in particular, agriculture, has decreased while urban industrial and service sector employment has become more significant in terms of income and other opportunities. Similarly, the relative significance of private sector employment has also increased. These changes have not benefited all youth equally as youth from certain strata and social backgrounds have more opportunities in the private sector than others.

The adoption of a liberal, market-led development strategy resulted in significant economic growth leading to the creation of new income opportunities for many

people. The emergence of commercial classes in diverse spheres also led to significant income inequalities. Cities and towns have become centres of accumulation and private consumption producing rapid change in the urban landscape. Urban areas are today dotted with signs and manifestations of affluence and conspicuous consumption, in contrast to the rural landscape which by and large displays signs of neglect, poverty and marginalisation.

The above state of affairs facilitates rural urban migration. This is significant in the context of Sri Lanka where rural-urban migration had remained a marginal phenomenon for nearly three decades after independence owing to pro-rural economic and social policies implemented by post-independence regimes. There are signs that this situation is rapidly changing as more and more youth tend to look for livelihood opportunities outside the rural sector.

On the other hand, the types of opportunities that have come up in urban areas are mostly for low-status, casual employment in construction sites, Free Trade Zones, and the informal sector. Many educated rural youth do not aspire to take up such opportunities; they look for more regular, white-collar employment in the state and private sectors. Yet, they can hardly compete with more privileged urban youth for more lucrative private sector jobs. Hence, their overwhelming desire to find employment in the state sector where employment is stable and more prestigious.

In any competitive situation, cleavages among competitors depend on a range of factors, in keeping with both actual experiences as well as subjective perceptions. In a democratic environment that allows and enables different groups and their representatives to publicly articulate grievances and issues, individual experiences and subjective perceptions often get transformed into public perceptions and collective demands. The result is the emergence of a plurality of collective grievances and public perceptions, the diversity of which depends on the range of

politically significant and competing constituencies. The latter depends on the existing and potential divisions of the national electorate, be they on class, regional, ethnic, linguistic, caste or ideological lines.

Sri Lanka's national electorate showed signs of increasing segmentation after independence. While the leftist parties from the 1930's onwards brought existing and emerging class divisions to the foreground, ethnically conscious parties emphasised the increasing ethnicisation of the national electorate. The tendency became further reinforced when the competition for sharing the national economic cake and public goods was increasingly perceived as one between ethnic groups. On the other hand, post independence educational-, language- and development policies also contributed to an intensification of ethnic consciousness among competing constituencies, in particular youth with aspirations for social mobility.

Introduction of free education in the two local languages, namely Sinhala and Tamil was bound to generate a backlash at a time when English continued to be the official language as well as the business language in business establishments. When more and more youth from the two native linguistic communities began to leave schools with educational certificates looking for employment, it was natural for pressure to build up to dethrone English paving the way for local languages. It was at this point that the rift between the two native linguistic communities came to the surface leading to a major public contestation. The demand from the majority linguistic community to make its language the official language replacing English did not go uncontested by the representatives of the Tamil minority that naturally preferred a two-language policy. The issue was resolved in favour of the majority community when Sinhala was made the official language in 1956.

State sector employment that many underprivileged youth considered as the most desirable path to upward social mobility now became open to many Sinhala-

educated youth. Subsequent amendments to the Official Languages Act made Tamil also a national language to be used in Tamil – speaking areas, yet, the majority community could dominate in the area of state sector employment at a time when private sector employment remained highly restricted due to state led, left-leaning development policies adopted after 1956.

The populist, welfare oriented development policies pursued by many post-independence regimes, particularly after 1956, resulted in an explosion of popular aspirations and demands. The vast rural population living at a subsistence level, politically made aware by the leftist, populist parties, expected the state to provide food subsidies, social infrastructure services free of charge, and create state-sector employment for their educated sons and daughters. Increasing welfare budgets of these regimes left little for productive investment that would have led to economic growth and employment generation. On the other hand, being dependent on three agricultural commodities for export earnings at a time when terms of trade for such commodities continued to worsen, the country came under irresistible pressure to cut back essential imports including investment goods leading to serious economic difficulties.

Economic stagnation that followed resulted in widespread unemployment, in particular among educated youth. This naturally coincided with a major youth uprising in the early 1970's led by the People's Liberation Front whose support base has always comprised the underprivileged, educated Sinhalese youth. Some of the steps taken by the then government to appease this youth constituency were perceived as discriminatory by Tamil-speaking, minority youth who were also under-privileged and had similar educational and employment aspirations as their Sinhalese counterparts.

The above tendencies, in turn further reinforced the lines separating the competing political constituencies at the national level as competition for public goods became more intensified. Persisting educational and employment policies in post-independence Sri Lanka did not help narrow the gap between competing youth constituencies. In fact, they helped preserve such youth constituencies. Many youths across the ethnic divide have tended to perceive the competition as a zero-sum game, without realising the commonality of their interest vis-à-vis the anglicised, urban elite that cuts across ethnic and other primordial divisions. Here, their inability to communicate across linguistic and regional boundaries has been a major obstacle. The result is the development of two separate youth constituencies linked to the two main ethnic communities. Intensification of the ethnic conflict in the country over the last two decades is partly a reflection of the widening gap between these two constituencies.

Today, aspirations of these youth constituencies go very much beyond the limited social and economic aspirations of under-privileged youth. In fact, today they are more concerned with wider political aspirations, the aspiration of capturing political power. This is the case with the JVP, the party representing the interests of underprivileged Sinhala youth and the LTTE, which claims to represent not just the under- privileged Tamil Youth but also the entire Tamil- speaking community in the North and East of the country. While the JVP wishes to safeguard the Sri Lankan state in its unitary, majoritarian form, the LTTE aspires to carve out a separate state in the North and East as an exclusive preserve for the Tamil-speaking minority.

There, the emergence of separate youth constituencies is not a random event in the recent history of Sri Lanka. It is in fact the result of the interplay of a range of forces and factors, both historical and contemporary. On the other hand, it seems unreasonable to assume that Sri Lankan youth could be divided into two or more

broad ethnic fronts when the conditions prevailing throughout the country are far more diverse and complex. It is only a detailed empirical study like the National Youth survey covering a national sample of youth, which may do justice to such diversity and complexity.

Youth, Conflict and Development in Sri Lanka: a Critical Triangle

State explanations of violent conflicts are directed either towards the ethnic dimension (as in the Northern conflict) or (as in the Southern conflict) described as a generational problem. Insurgencies are then seen and explained as a youth phenomenon. This ensures that attention is drawn away from prevailing political and economic structures of society and focus on something that can be easily dismissed (Cohen 1997). Generally, youth – as a relational concept to adulthood - is often seen in a negative image and as a status of deficit (not adult), bringing in structures of power relations within a patriarchal order. But it is important to highlight that young people become marginalised not because of their perceived deficiencies, but because of the operation of economic and political processes working against them (Wyn/ White 1997). Thus, while operational in practice, ethnic discrimination/ racism may be subsumed by a greater understanding of social discrimination, which in this particular case affects youth especially and paves the way for their preparedness to join violent groups.

In order to achieve sustained progress towards peace and the end of violent conflict (in the North as well as in the South of Sri Lanka), youth must be seen as a critical target group by policy makers and development workers in most, if not all, development-oriented initiatives. The economic and political contexts of violent conflict, whether in pre-, post- or actual conflict situation (such as experienced in

different parts of the country) place a high degree of structural restrictions on the life-chances of youth in Sri Lanka.

One major impediment in the formation of appropriate youth-oriented policies and programs has been the lack of an in-depth understanding of the youth in terms of their aspirations and grievances, their ideas, values and attitudes, and their main experiences within the social, economic and political realm. Most youth-oriented intervention attempts have been based on common but unverified perceptions and assumptions about youth needs. This negligence among development workers to access the felt experiences and the lived realities of youth, and to integrate such information in policy and program design, has compromised the ability to provide an accurate and relevant account of how the space for adequate life-chances is re-negotiated through violent conflict.

Structural mechanisms that facilitate the social integration of youth and that avoid the further discrimination of youth are an important domain to be addressed and undertaken in youth development projects, as social integration is one of the factors directly mediating the space of life-chances. Processes that help youth to be pro-active within their families and that facilitate soci(et)al integration into their local communities have often been overlooked in youth development initiatives in favour of those that help youth obtain economic gains.

Soci(et)al integration refers to the creation of space for youth and youth activities in the construction of community and in community development, where the status of youth itself and members of the youth population are sanctioned as contributing to the overall well-being of a particular community. The current attitude towards youth is that youth as such are disruptive forces for the community, and that youth activities should be marginalised from mainstream community efforts. A common result is that youth activities are often taken to mean only various sport- and

education-related activities that may not have an obviously discernible and immediate benefit for the community, and is seen in isolation of the community. To formalise structural mechanisms through which youth become integrated constructively into society is rarely formulated into the objectives of development initiatives. Rather active decision-making outcomes imply the belief that social integration follows economic integration, and that as long as economic integration cannot be realised, there is no valid space for alternative efforts at social integration.

The typical development initiatives targeting youth commonly focus on vocational training and other educational assistance for youth, aiming to alleviate economic difficulties and thereby integrate them into society. However, there are hardly any strategies being formulated that enable youth to participate actively in accepted societal institutions to develop their own social-economic-political realities. Even when some youth take their own initiative to engage in endeavours that may eventually benefit them and the larger community, public bureaucracies often send them from post to pillar until they give up, thereby giving the authorities the opportunity to blame the victim and classify them as lacking self initiative, motivation and desire to take up challenging opportunities. This was the experience of the two co-editors and a group of recently passed out social science graduates who, a few years back embarked upon an action research initiative in southern Sri Lanka to explore possibilities for alternative livelihoods for underprivileged but educated youth in the country (YULIP, 2001).

The Role of Youth Research in Sri Lanka

It is against the above background that Sri Lankan youths have drawn the attention of both academics as well as policy makers. In fact, following the second uprising

in the late 1980's, the then President of the country appointed a commission to look into the issues of youth unrest and make recommendations to address them. The commission, which did not have adequate time to investigate the issues empirically in-depth, nevertheless pointed to many sources of frustration for youth. Since then there have been many discussions and debates about youth unrest and the increasingly violent and intolerant nature of their politics. In the absence of systematic studies, these discussion and debates have been rather impressionistic in nature.

The National Youth Survey conducted in 1999/ 2000 was conceived against the above background. Its main objective has been two-fold: firstly to outline the socio-economic profile of the country's youth population, aged 15-29 years, and secondly, to give the country's youth an opportunity to express their subjective feelings, aspirations, preferences, attitudes, ideological orientations and perceptions etc. The subject areas covered by the survey were determined after a series of workshop consultations involving a wide range of specialists and interest groups. The data collection was done using a questionnaire administrated by trained graduate interviewers. The national multi-stage stratified random sample of youth interviewed included 2892 youth. In addition, a whole range of detailed qualitative case studies has been conducted to supplement the statistical data.

The survey has generated, for the first time in Sri Lanka, a comprehensive data base concerning youth from all parts of the country, including the North and East. While the database gives us an opportunity to have a close look at the country's youthful population in its diverse aspects, it also provides a reasonable baseline against which future changes can be investigated through similar surveys. The detailed quantitative and qualitative data will facilitate discussions, debates and analysis on youth-related issues in many years to come. Far more important, however, would be the use that the data can put to in the areas of policy formation

and program development at both national and sub-national levels. The analysis and interpretation of selected data taken from the National Youth Survey by a number of distinguished Sri Lankan and International scholars, is a first step in this direction.

Structure of the Book

The book can be divided in four parts. The first part, written by Prof. S.T. Hettige, provides a broad overview on the profile of the youth interviewed with a special focus laid on the socio-cultural orientations of youth in Sri Lanka, as well as some important policy perspectives arising out of this profile.

The second part, written by Prof. W. D. Lakshman and Prof. Chandra Gunawardena, focuses on the two main areas of concern mentioned by the overwhelming majority of youth in the survey: namely access to (adequate) employment and education.

The third part concentrates on questions of governance and youth. Dr. Laksiri Fernando reflects on the Sri Lankan survey data, whereas the team of Prof. Mitra uses the opportunity to compare survey data arising from identical questions from an Indian national survey and the Sri Lankan youth survey.

The very critical aspect of violent youth conflict, as described in the previous section, is further explored by two papers focusing directly on the conflict-affected areas of Sri Lanka, utilising relevant data on regional variations and similarities. Dr. C.Y. Thangarajah investigates the situation of youth in Eastern Sri Lanka, whilst Dr. Markus Mayer provides a comparison of mainly qualitative data highlighting the incidences of felt social discrimination of youth from Jaffna in the

North of Sri Lanka, where the ongoing Tamil youth struggle initiated and from Hambantota in the South, where the JVP, the radical Marxist party with a base among the rural Sinhalese, led two major uprisings in the past.

In the present publication, different authors have looked at a range of issues in the light of the National Youth Survey data. Their lines of enquiry have been influenced by their specific academic orientations derived from within their respective disciplines. Since the chapters contributed by these writers are fairly self-contained, no attempt is made to highlight all the policy relevant issues discussed by them. Each article provides an in-depth analysis of crucial youth problems arising from the Youth Survey data, where the authors have also attempted to place the perceptions of the youth into a wider (structural) framework. By doing so, each article contains a number of policy relevant recommendations and information for policy makers, development and humanitarian workers and other practitioners.

However, the primary intention of this publication is to provide a sound academic interpretation of selected data of the National Youth Survey of Sri Lanka. This should foremost enable more reliable access to important findings and outcomes of this survey. Various agencies and organisations, working with youth issues, are invited to further discuss the implications of the analyses contained within the different papers of this volume for improving policies and programs towards youth integration in Sri Lanka.

References

Amin, S. (1997): Capitalism in the Age of Globalisation, London, Zed Books.
Cohen, P. (1997): Rethinking the Youth Question, London, Macmillan.
Epstein, J.S. (1998) (ed.): Youth Culture and Identity in a Post Modern World,

Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers.

Fornas, J and Bolin, G. (eds.) (1995): Youth Culture in Late Modernity, London, Sage Publications.

Harris, O.C.(1992)- From Class Struggle to the Politics of Pleasure, London, Rutledge.

Hettige, S.T. (1995): Economic Liberalisation and the Emerging Patterns of Social Inequality in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences, Vol.18, No.1 & 2, pp. 87-115.

Hettige, S.T. (2000): Economic Liberalisation, Qualifications and Livelihoods in Sri Lanka, in Assessment in Education, Vol.7, No. 3, pp. 325-333.

Hettige, S.T./ M. Mayer (2000): Sri Lanka at Crossroads. Dilemmas and Perspectives After 50 Years of Independence. Macmillan, New Delhi.

Mayer, M. (forthcoming): Empowering Youth: An Approach from Southern Sri Lanka. In: VISTA, Vol. 1/ 2002, Open University – Colombo.

Wyn, J./ R. White (1997): Rethinking Youth. London.

YULIP (2001): Youth Livelihood Project – Final Report. CASS-GTZ, Colombo.

Sri Lankan Youth: Profiles and Perspectives

S. T. Hettige

Social, political and cultural significance of youth varies across societies depending on a range of circumstances. Social and political significance of Sri Lankan youth increased rapidly after political independence not only due to their growing numerical strength but also owing to their changing socio-political profile. The first anti-systemic youth rebellion in southern Sri Lanka in 1971 left little doubt about the growing political importance of youth in the country. This perception was reinforced further in the late 1980's when the JVP-led second youth uprising not only disrupted law and order but also brought about a major shake up in the social and political system of the country. On the other hand, the grievances of northern Tamil youth, both real and perceived, have played a significant part in the ethnic conflict in the country, at least since the mid-1970's.

The growing political significance of youth in the last several decades is undoubtedly a reflection of certain objective and subjective conditions. On one hand, the political dominance of certain youth constituencies should not overshadow the fact that Sri Lankan youth do not constitute an undifferentiated mass but display considerable diversity in terms of their socio-economic profiles as well as their social, cultural and ideological orientations. On the other hand, political behaviour of youth cannot be discussed in isolation of their perceptions, lived experiences, grievances and aspirations. How they perceive the world around them is a critical factor that underpins their behaviour in politics and other spheres.

Understanding youth in terms of what is outlined above is critical for any attempt to address youth issues in terms of policy and programmes in a range of areas. The recently concluded National Youth Survey in Sri Lanka is the first nation-wide

study that has made a significant contribution to the above understanding. The present paper, based on the above survey, is intended to address two broad areas. Firstly, it provides a profile of youth in Sri Lanka, based on the sample survey with special attention being given to the dominant social and cultural orientations of youth and significant variations across major divisions. Secondly, some selected policy implications arising from the survey results will be discussed.

Part I: Profile of Sri Lankan Youth

In this section of the chapter, an attempt is made to provide a profile of Sri Lankan youth, outlining only some selected aspects.

1. Demographic Profile of Sample Youth

It is necessary to provide an overview of the demographic characteristics of the sample population at the outset. Of the sample of 2892 youths interviewed as part of the survey, nearly 50% belong to the age category 15-19 years. While 36.6% were between 20-24 years of age, the remaining 14.8% belonged to the higher age bracket of 25-29 years. The sample is obviously biased towards the younger age group. This was due to the fact that married youth were excluded from the sample and these persons mostly belonged to higher age groups.[1]

As regards the gender composition of the sample, males were over represented, which is 57%. Female respondents were only 43%. This is largely the result of the elimination of married persons. As is well known, age at marriage for women is

[1] The definition of youth was provided by youth themselves in various focus group discussions before the survey was conducted. They defined youth as the unmarried population belonging to the age group 15-29 years.

lower than for men so when the married persons are excluded, it results in a reduction in the female sample.

The sectoral composition of the sample appears to be in conformity with the actual distribution of the population in the country across urban, rural and estate sectors. Thus, 19.5% of the sample coming from the urban sector is about the same as the proportion of the population living in cities and towns. The same can also be said about rural sector, which is 74.6%, and estate sector, which is 5.9% of the sample.

Ethnic composition of the sample is not far removed from the composition of the national population. Sinhalese youth, which is 77.5%, is slightly more represented in comparison to their Tamil counterparts, which is 14.9%. This is mostly due to the fact that the sample of Tamil youth from the North and East is somewhat underrepresented in the national sample, as certain areas in this region were inaccessible due to security reasons.

2. Socio-economic Profile of the Sample

Education has long been a major avenue of socio-economic advancement for Sri Lankan youth. Yet, the proportion of the population reaching a higher level of education has remained significantly low in comparison with many other countries in the region. This is also evident from the survey results. Only 2.7% of youth have reached university level. It is significant that nearly 40% of youth were engaged in studies at the time of the interviews. Of those who belong to the younger age group between 15 to 19 years, the proportion is as much as 63%. On the other hand, of those who are 25 years or above, only 7% are still engaged in studies. It is also noteworthy that 46.1% of female respondents are engaged in studies compared to only 33.6% among male respondents. This shows that more

female youth tend to remain within the education system for a long period than their male counterparts (See table 1).

Table 1: Activity Status of Sample Youth (Percentage)

Groups	Employed (permanent)	(Employed (casual)	Unemployed (seeking job)	Schooling/ Studying	Unable to work	Domestic work	Others
All groups	11.0	15.0	30.3	39.0	0.2	4.0	0.5
Male	13.9	21.0	29.2	33.6	0.2	1.3	0.8
Female	7.1	7.2	31.8	46.1	0.2	7.5	0.2
Sinhalese	9.6	14.2	31.4	40.7	0.3	3.6	0.2*
Tamil	16.7	18.3	26.5	32.9	-	4.0	1.6
Moor	14.0	15.9	26.1	33.8	-	8.7	1.4
Malay	-	25.0*	25.0*	50.0*	-	-	-
Burger	-	25.0*	37.5*	37.5*	-	-	-
Western	13.7	17.3	30.9	35.2	0.1*	2.4	0.4*
Central	9.8	11.2	31.6	42.6	-	4.0	0.8*
Southern	8.4	9.9	33.2	44.9	-	3.3	0.3*
Northern	12.9	19.0	19.6	42.9	-	3.1*	2.5*
Eastern	17.2	8.3	27.6	39.1	-	6.8	1.0*
North-western	8.0	15.8	27.0	41.7	1.1*	6.3	-
North-central	7.7	14.9	37.0	34.8	-	5.5	-
UVA	7.8	20.0	28.3	38.3	-	4.4	1.1*
Sabaragamuwa	10.7	18.8	31.6	34.6	0.4*	3.7	-
Urban	12.6	16.2	23.0	43.4	0.2*	4.1	0.5*
Rural	10.0	14.6	32.4	38.5	0.2*	3.7	0.5
Estate	16.1	15.5	28.6	32.1	-	7.1	0.6*
15-19 Years	2.8	8.7	21.6	63.0	0.2*	3.4	0.4*
20-24 Years	14.1	20.0	40.3	20.3	0.1*	4.8	0.4*
25-29 Years	29.6	23.2	34.6	07.0	0.5*	4.0	1.4
Grade 1-5	20.3	28.8	23.7	19.5	1.7*	5.1	0.8*
Grade 6-11	10.0	17.4	34.4	32.0	0.1*	5.6	0.5
Ready for A /L	8.9	10.3	22.9	54.9	-	2.5	0.5*
Passed A/L	15.4	13.0	34.0	35.5	-	1.9	0.2*
Degree or higher	11.4	7.6	27.8	51.9	-	1.3*	-
No schooling	15.8*	36.8	26.3	-	10.5*	5.3*	5.3*

*Five or less cases

The above Table provides detailed data on the activity status of sample youth. While 11% of them are permanently employed, another 15% report that they are in casual employment. The rate of unemployment among the sample is as high as 30%. Only 4% of the respondents are reportedly engaged in domestic work or unpaid family work alone.

The activity status of sample youth varies widely across demographic and socio-economic categories. As it is evident, the rate of employment, both permanent and casual, is much higher among males than among females, the former being twice as much as the latter. On the other hand, the unemployment rate is not very much higher among females than males. It is noteworthy that many more females than males are engaged in domestic work.

Regional variations with respect to activity status are significant. The proportion of youth still engaged in studies is higher in some outlying provinces like southern, central, northern, north central, eastern and Uva. In the same provinces, the rate of employment is relatively low, the lowest being in the southern province with just 18%, much lower than the national average of 26%. On the other hand, the rate of employment in the western province is 31%, which is the highest for any province indicating that youth in this province enjoy a relatively more advantageous position with respect to employment prospects.

The above patterns are in line with rural-urban differences as well. The unemployment rate is the lowest for the urban sector (23%) compared with 32.4% for rural youth. In the estate sector, the rate of unemployment is 28.6%. The proportion of youth still in education is the lowest in the estate sector with 32%, compared with 43% in urban areas.

As for age, there are some clear variations. As one would expect, employment rate increases sharply with age, indicating a steady transition from education to employment over time. Of those within the age group of 24-29 years, nearly 53% are already in employment, compared with just over 11% for the 15-19 year category. On the other hand, only 7% of the older age group are still in education compared to 63% of the younger group. What is significant, however, is that over 34% of the older age group remain unemployed. And finally, looking at how activity status varies with education, it is clear that the rate of employment decreases with increasing educational achievement. The highest rate of employment is recorded for those with no schooling or primary education, 52% and 49% respectively. The lowest rate is recorded for those with university degrees.

3. Economic Dependence of Youth

A high rate of unemployment and a very high proportion of youth continuing to engage in studies naturally make many youth economically dependent on their families for their basic needs. This, no doubt, is an important factor influencing their behaviour and social relationships.

Nearly 72% of the interviewed youth report that they are dependent on others for their basic material needs. While this is understandable for very young persons, the fact that 41% of those who are above 25 years continue to be so dependent is noteworthy. When those who are partially dependent are also added, the proportion increases to nearly 60%.

Another noteworthy feature is that a larger proportion of females is dependent on others for their basic material needs (85%), compared with 61.7% among male

respondents. Only 7% of females are independent compared with 25% of the male respondents.

A remarkable feature of the statistical picture is that economic dependence increases rapidly with increasing education. Those with little or no education report very high rates of economic independence, compared to those with a higher level of educational achievement. This seems understandable, in view of the fact that the rate of unemployment is also high among highly educated youth.

As stated earlier, it is evident that nearly 72% of the youth respondents reportedly depend on others for their basic material needs. Therefore, it is important to see, on whom the majority of youth are dependent for their basic material needs. 97% of the youth depend on their parents while only 3% of them state that they depend on relatives or others.

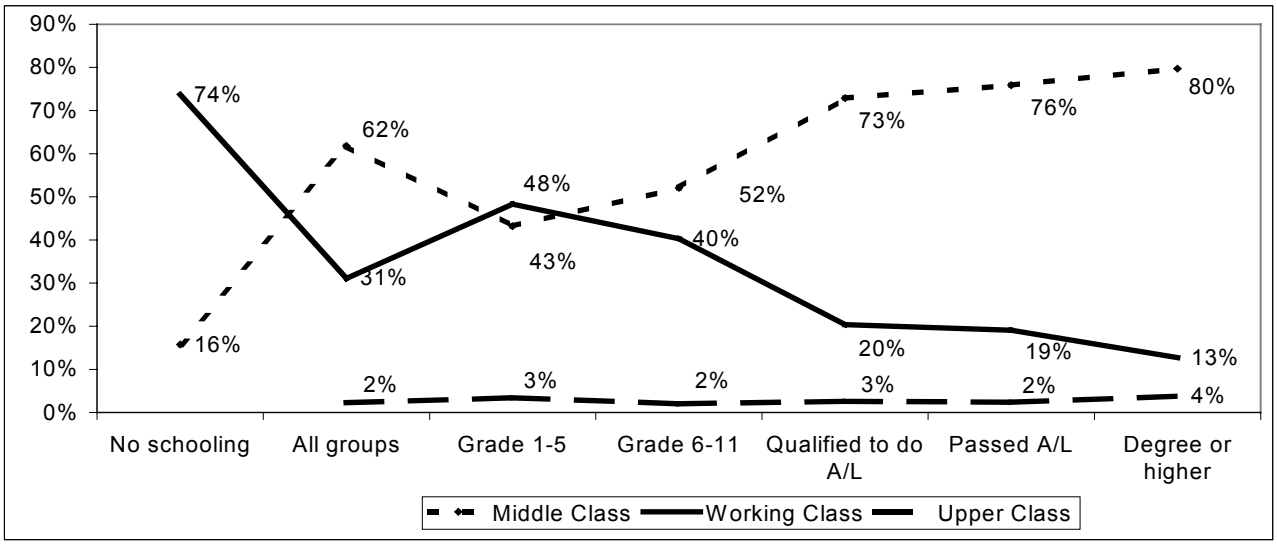
4. Social Class Identity of Youth

Social class identity of youth appears to be as much a product of their life circumstances as their social aspirations. Being young and dependent, many youth are not yet in a position to achieve a rank of their choice. So, when they claim that they belong to a particular class, it may reflect the socio-economic background of their families or what they hope to achieve in the near future. The dominant tendency among youth surveyed, to claim middle class membership appears to indicate their aspirations for upward social mobility (see Table 2). When one looks at the very strong relationship between class identification and educational attainment, it appears to be reasonable to assume that youth tend to form their own class identity depending more on their actual educational attainment than on their actual economic circumstances (see Graph 1).

Table 2: Class Self-identification among Sample Youth (Percentage)

	Middle class	Working class	Upper class	Other	Don't know
All groups	61.8	31.1	2.3	1.1	3.6
15-19	59.5	32.8	2.6	1.4	3.8
20-24	63.9	30.4	1.6	0.7	3.4
25-29	64.5	27.5	3.3	1.6	3.1
Urban	69.6	23.4	3.4	1.6	2.0
Rural	63.1	30.1	1.9	1.0	3.9
Estate	19.6	70.8	4.2	1.2	4.2
Male	59.9	33.7	2.0	1.4	3.1
Female	64.4	27.9	2.7	0.8	4.1
Western	67.1	25.5	2.3	1.2	4.0
Central	59.3	34.6	2.9	-	3.2
Southern	60.3	33.1	2.8	1.8	2.1
Northern	72.0	18.9	4.3	1.2	3.7
Eastern	69.6	25.8	3.1	-	1.5
North-western	61.3	31.8	2.0	1.4	3.5
North-central	47.8	48.2	0.6	1.1	3.3
Uva	42.9	48.6	2.3	1.7	4.5
Sabaragamuwa	63.5	28.0	0.7	1.8	5.9
Sinhalese	63.4	29.7	2.0	2.0	3.6
Tamil	52.2	40.1	3.7	0.9	3.0
Moor	65.2	28.1	2.4	0.5	3.8
Malay	50.0	50.0	-	-	-
Burger	75.0	25.0	-	-	-

Graph 1: Class Self-identification among Sample Youth



Social class identification nevertheless varies across regional and sectoral boundaries. The proportion of youth identifying themselves as belonging to middle class in the estate sector is as low as 19.6%, while it is more in the urban sector. Given the fact that the estate sector mostly comprises lowly paid, manual workers, the above pattern of response is quite understandable. Most of these workers are Tamils.

As is evident from the data in Table 2, 52.2% of Tamil youths identify themselves as members of the middle class, while the corresponding proportions for other ethnic groups are even higher. It is also noteworthy that the proportion of youth identifying themselves as middle class is significantly lower in socio-economically disadvantaged, peripheral regions like Uva and North-Central provinces.

5. Language Proficiency

Language has been a persisting socio-political issue in Sri Lanka at least since Independence. This is understandable in view of the fact that three main languages have long been used in the country, and that one language or another has been bestowed with greater official recognition, thereby providing the user of that language undue advantage over the others. The English language, which was spoken by a small minority, was the official language during the British period 1796 - 1948). Though it ceased to be the official language in 1956, its importance has remained virtually unchanged till the present day.

On the other hand, the vast majority of people belonging to main ethnic groups living side by side, speaking two distinct languages, have by and large remained monolingual and have not been able to communicate across the ethnic division, and this has been a major factor contributing to the current ethnic conflict.

Sinhala

It is significant that a large majority, 88% of youth interviewed, report that they have a very good knowledge of Sinhala, while only a small minority, 7%-11% of respondents report that they do not have a knowledge of Sinhala. As regards the speaking and writing ability in the Sinhala language, there are significant variations by province, ethnicity and sector.

If we first look at the situation of Tamil and Muslim ethnic groups, it is evident that nearly one third, 36%, of Tamil youth report that they have a very good or good knowledge of Sinhala, while only one fifth of them have very good or good Sinhala writing skills. On the other hand, more Muslim youth (62%), can speak and can write (47%) very good or good Sinhala, compared to Tamil youth.

Regional variations with respect to Sinhala writing and speaking ability are also significant. It is clear that the proportion of youth who do not have or have poor Sinhala speaking and writing skills is higher among youth in the Northern and Eastern provinces due to spatial segregation of Tamil and Muslim ethnic groups in these provinces.

It is also noteworthy, that the proportion of youth who have poor writing ability is relatively higher in Uva, and in Central province, due to the large number of estate plantation youth in these provinces. On the other hand, youth in Southern, North-Central and Western provinces have the highest proficiency in speaking (81%), and writing (74%) in Sinhala, which is much higher than the national average.

And finally, looking at how language proficiency varies with age, it is clear that the rate of language proficiency decreases with increasing age. The age group of 15-19 records the highest rate of Sinhala proficiency, which is 85% in speaking

and 78% in writing while the lowest rate is recorded from the age group of 25-29, 74%, speaking and 68% in writing respectively.

Tamil

As is evident from the survey, a majority of youth interviewed, following their self-assessment, do not have speaking (68%), or writing ability (72%) in Tamil, while only one fourth of the youth have a very good or good knowledge of Tamil, either spoken (25%) or in writing (22%).

When we look at the data tabulated by key socio-demographic variables, some interesting patterns emerge. For instance, the ability to speak and write either very good or good Tamil is marginally higher among males than among females, while nearly 90% of the Sinhala youth have no ability at all either to speak, or write, in Tamil, indicating the monolingual nature of Sinhala youth.

Regional variations with respect to proficiency in Tamil are also significant. It is clear that the proportion of youth who have little or no writing and speaking skills in Tamil is higher among youth in the Western, Southern, North-Western and Sabaragamuwa provinces due to the segregation of the Sinhala ethnic group in these provinces. It is also significant to note the differences between different sectors in the above regard. Proficiency in Tamil is the highest among estate youth, followed by urban and rural respondents.

English

Fluency in the English language continues to be confined to a tiny minority of youth, except in the highly urbanised Western province where 5.6% of the youth report fluency as given in the table 3. The proportion of youth with a high level of English language proficiency is an insignificant minority. Also there are significant variations in the responses across social divisions. It is evident that

knowledge of English or lack of it is a major aspect of the urban-rural division in the country. In this regard, there is no major gap between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, as the overwhelming majority of them is rural, and remains monolingual.

Table 3: English Language Proficiency Among Sample Youth

Groups	Very good	Good	Poor	Not at all
Total	2.5	22.3	45.0	30.1
Urban	7.8	31.6	40.4	16.2
Rural	1.1	20.6	45.7	32.6
Estate	3.0	13.6	37.9	45.6
Sinhalese	2.0	21.6	44.2	32.2
Tamil	3.1	21.7	49.6	25.5
Moor	6.2	31.0	43.8	19.0
Malay	-	50.0*	-	50.0*
Burger	25.0*	12.5*	62.5	-
Western	5.6	27.0	42.1	25.2
Central	2.9	17.8	42.3	37.0
Southern	0.8*	19.7	49.5	30.0
Northern	3.8	24.1	58.9	13.3
Eastern	1.5*	27.3	59.3	11.9
North-western	0.6*	25.7	41.9	31.8
North-central	0.6*	16.6	39.2	43.6
UVA	0.6*	14.4	42.8	42.2
Sabaragamuwa	0.7*	19.1	41.5	38.6
Grade 1-5	0.8*	12.7	28.8	57.6
Grade 6-11	0.9	10.6	44.4	44.1
Ready for A/L	3.1	31.6	46.9	15.4
Passed A/L	5.9	41.3	44.2	8.6
Degree or higher	11.4	46.8	40.5	1.3*
No schooling	-	-	10.5	89.5

*Five or less cases

So far in the present chapter, an attempt has been made to provide a broad socio-economic profile of Sri Lankan youth based on the survey findings. The remaining pages of the first part are devoted for an examination of the social and cultural orientations of youth.

6. Social and Cultural Orientations of Sri Lankan Youth

Sri Lanka was colonised by three western powers, commencing from the early 16th century. During the British rule, which lasted for over 150 years till the country gained political independence in 1948, Sri Lanka's economy, social structure, political system, and even cultural values underwent drastic changes. These changes influenced the general population in significant ways altering their worldview, thinking, values, cultural norms, aspirations, desires, social relations, identities, etc. These changes did not, however amount to a process of change unchallenged by indigenous forces. The organised nationalist movement that emerged in the late 19th century became critical of some of the changes and attempted to revive native institutions and cultural ethics. Many nationalist leaders agitated for greater life chances and opportunities for native groups.

The post-independence period has been characterised by even more changes. Population growth, expansion of education and other social sectors, democratisation of politics, rapid growth of the public sector, social reforms, land redistribution and rural settlement programmes, etc. significantly altered the life chances of many people. Some of the changes altered existing social and political divisions and their interrelations.

One of the main outcomes of colonialism has been the spread of Western values, ideas and institutions in the colony. Many social scientists felt that this would pave the way for a transition from tradition to modernity. Empirical evidence, however, has shown that the result has been the creation of a small westernised, native elite and the ways of the larger population have not been radically altered. In fact, after independence, instruments of modernisation, now in the hands of native leaders, have been employed to reinforce primordial identities and traditional institutions.

As a result traditional social institutions and cultural practices did not disappear (Hettige, 1998).

It is against the above background that we have to examine the social and cultural orientations of Sri Lankan youth who have been influenced not only by the colonial legacy but also by post-independence reforms in diverse fields. Empirical evidence deriving from the National Youth Survey points to their present social and cultural orientations. What should be noted at the outset is that there is a high level of pluralism among Sri Lankan youth in terms of their social and cultural orientations. This is not to discount some of the more dominant tendencies prevalent among youth. In the next pages, an attempt is made to give an overview of the above orientations. This is done under several sub-headings for convenience of presentation and analysis.

6.1. Social Relations

What is the nature of social relationships of young people? In order to explore this issue, several questions were asked. The first question was about the persons with whom youth spend most of their free time. As is evident from table 4, it is significant that less than 50% of the respondents state that they usually spend the day with family. About a third of the youth report that they spend the day with friends, while another 11% appear to interact closely with peers and co-workers. It is noteworthy that only a very small proportion of youth state that they spend their time with relatives outside the family.

Table 4: Social Relations – *With whom do you mostly spend your free time?*

Spend Most of the Day With	Frequency	Valid Percent
Family Members	1308	45.3
Neighbours	51	1.8
Peers and co-workers	319	11
Relatives	51	1.8
Friends	1004	34.8
Other	119	4.1
No specific persons	4	0.1
By myself	31	1.1
Children	2	0.1
Total	2889	100

In regard to close social relations, there are significant differences among different youth groups. Firstly, the gender difference is remarkable. While a majority of female respondents spend their time with family members, a majority of male youth state that they spend their time with friends, peers and co-workers.

There are significant differences among age groups as well. With increasing age, youth tend to spend more and more time with peers, co-workers and friends. The quality of social relationships is as important as the nature and extent of such relationships. When asked about the availability of emotional support when needed, the vast majority, 90.7%, answered in the affirmative. It is noteworthy that most of those who do not have such support come from lower social strata and deprived communities such as the least educated, and the plantation community. For instance, as much as 31% of the respondents with no education and nearly 18% of estate sector youth report that they do not have such support.

As mentioned earlier, a large proportion of youth spends a lot of time with their families. What is interesting to find out here is their relative position vis-à-vis that of other family members. Do they feel that they have influence within the family or feel alienated? It is noteworthy that the vast majority of youth state that they play a significant role in intra-family decision-making process. Only 22% of the

respondents say that they do not play such a role. It is significant that there is no considerable gender difference in the above regard. If at all, more females than males state that they are playing a role in the family decision making process.

It is noteworthy that the proportion of youth playing a role in the family decision making process increases with better educational attainment. For instance, nearly 37% of those with no schooling report that they do not play a role whereas, only about 11% of those with G. C .E. A/L fall into this category. It is also worth noting that there are significant differences among religious groups in the role they play in decision making. A total of 30% of Muslim youth report that they do not play a role whereas only 17% of Hindu youth give the same answer in comparison to 22% of Buddhists, 20% Roman Catholics and 19% Christian youth giving this answer.

6.2. Ethnocentrism in a Multi-ethnic Society

The formation of social and cultural identities among youth and their attitudes towards other communities and cultures is the result of a range of circumstances. In this regard, whether youth have opportunities to interact with communities and cultures other than their own is a critical factor.

It is highly significant that the vast majority of youth is socially segregated and has no opportunities to interact with peers from other ethnic communities. There is no doubt that regional segregation, ethnically segregated school system, inability to speak the language of the other, etc. has contributed immensely to the above state of affairs. This is particularly so in rural areas, though the percentages are not any higher even in urban areas. With rising age, opportunities increase somewhat. This is no doubt due to increasing mobility for employment and other purposes.

Ethnic segregation appears to be greater among Sinhala youth; 91% of them say that all their friends are from the same ethnic group. The corresponding figures for Tamil and Muslim youths are 81% and 74%. It is noteworthy that only 5% of the Sinhalese youth admit having friends from other ethnic communities. Among Muslims, the figure is 22% followed by Tamil youth with 14%. It is also highly significant that, with increasing education, youth remain more segregated, not less. This no doubt is a reflection of the segregated nature of our schools and even many universities. In other words, youth with little or no education tend to have more friends belonging to other ethnic communities. By contrast, nearly 90% of the youth with a university education have all their friends from their own ethnic community. Only 7% of them have friends from other ethnic communities. In other words, more education does not lead to any blurring of the boundaries separating ethnic communities in the country.

Limited social interaction between youth belonging to different ethnic communities, partly owing to language barriers and partly due to lack of opportunities prevents them from appreciating each other's cultures. In fact, a majority of youth interviewed, 57%, did not wish to have contact with a culture other than their own. The fact that a sizeable segment of Sri Lankan youth is not interested in contact with other cultures is significant. When we look at variations in responses among ethnic groups, they are quite significant as well. For instance, only 35% of Sinhalese youth expressed interest as against nearly 70% of Tamil youth, followed by Muslim youth, 46%. While there is no significant difference at all between the genders, urban and rural differences are remarkable. For instance, while 53% of urban youth expressed interest in other cultures, only 37% of rural youth did so. On the other hand, 53% of estate sector youth expressed interest. It is also noteworthy that interest in other cultures increases with better educational attainment. While 31% of the youth with no education expressed interest in other

cultures, the proportion of youth with higher education with such interest is as much as 64%.

6.3. Secularisation and Sri Lankan Youth

Modernisation theory postulated that with the increasing influence of forces of modernisation such as secular education, modern scientific thinking, expansion of the mass media, urbanisation, and industrialisation, people who are exposed would embrace similar values and attitudes. Yet, what has been overlooked by these theorists is that some of these same instruments can be used to promote opposite tendencies. Where do the Sri Lankan youth stand against the above background? Here, we look at religiosity, and other traditional practices prevalent among them as given in table 5.

It is significant that 80% of the youth interviewed say that they consider themselves to be religious. Looking at the reported levels of participation in religious activities, the trend seems to be further corroborated by the data. In fact, 93% of the respondents report that they participate in religious activities on a regular basis.

What is highly significant is that the extent of religiosity does not vary with educational attainment. On the other hand, there is a relationship between religiosity and one's religion. While 94% Muslim youth report that they consider themselves to be religious, the proportion among Buddhists is 78% and 88% of Tamil youth belong to the category of being religious. There is also a significant difference between the genders, nearly 86% of female respondents as against 77% of male respondents declaring themselves as religious.

Urban-rural differences in the above regard are not very significant though the proportion of plantation youth who are mainly Tamil claiming to be religious, is

much higher than in the other sectors. There is no appreciable difference between age groups in the above regard.

Table 5: Religiosity (Percentage)

Groups	Yes	No	Do not know
All Groups	80.9	19.0	0.1*
Western	74.4	25.5	0.1*
Central	79.8	19.9	0.3*
Southern	82.9	16.8	0.3*
Northern	89.6	10.4	-
Eastern	92.2	7.8	-
North-western	77.6	22.4	-
North-central	85.6	14.4	-
UVA	86.1	13.9	-
Sabaragamuwa	82.7	17.3	-
Male	77.2	22.6	6.2*
Female	85.9	14.1	-
Sinhalese	78.1	21.8	0.1*
Tamil	88.8	11.0	0.2*
Moor	94.3	5.7	-
Malay	100*	-	-
Burger	87.5	12.5	-
1-5	83.8	21.8	-
6-11	82.3	17.6	0.1*
Qualified to do A/L	77.6	22.2	0.2*
Passed A/L	81.8	18.2	-
Degree or Higher	82.3	17.7	-
No Education	89.5	10.5*	-

*Five or less cases

6.4. Ideology and Values of Sri Lankan Youth

As is well known, ideologies and values be rooted from within a particular socio-cultural context or can emanate from an external source. As mentioned earlier, colonialism was a vehicle for the transmission of ideas and values from dominant

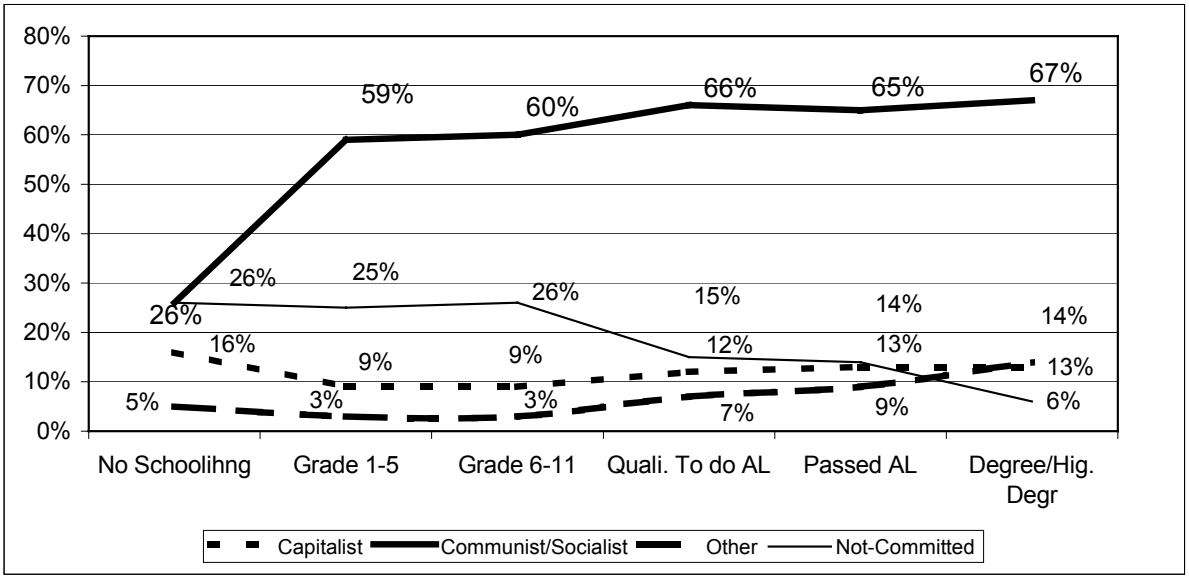
colonial centres to the colonised parts of the world. These ideas and values are inculcated in the minds of the colonised people through such institutions as the education system, the media, political parties and civil society organisations. They are not always accepted and embraced particularly when pre-existing value systems, ideologies and socio-political practices are in conflict with to new ones. On the other hand, people can also be selective with regard to ideas and values. For instance, they may embrace certain ideas and values emanating from outside sources while discarding others. Similarly, some ideas and values originating from within one's own culture and society may be abandoned, while others are jealously guarded. In other words, what we are talking about is not a process of westernisation or nativisation in a total sense, but often a judicious mix of both.

At the time of political independence, the country's political elite was divided into two broad ideological groups, one advocating a path of liberal, market-driven economic development, the other arguing for a state-led socialist path to socio-economic progress. Social transformation that took place under colonial rule combined with the increasing attractiveness of the socialist model in a highly polarised world made socialist ideology appealing to many people in countries like Sri Lanka. The notion of equality embedded in socialist ideology gained wide acceptance in a society characterised by class differentiation and unequal distribution of life chances. Political groups agitating for socialist reforms became highly influential in the national political arena.

The continuing commitment to socialist ideology on the part of a majority of Sri Lankan youth as evident from the national survey on youth is partly a reflection of what is outlined above and partly a product of the lived experience of a large majority of youth in the country.

As is well known, Sri Lanka has pursued an explicitly market-led development policy for almost 25 years now. So, it is remarkable that a large majority, 62% of the sampled youth continue to be committed to socialist ideology. Only a small minority of youth, 10%, expressed an explicit commitment to capitalist ideology. When we look at the distribution of responses among different youth groups, it becomes quite clear that ideological orientation is largely a reflection of their relative social position. In fact, commitment to socialist ideology is more widely prevalent among marginalised groups. This is evident from the data on regional variations. The highest proportions of youth committed to socialist ideology are reported from more remote and disadvantaged provinces like the Eastern, Northern, and North-central. It is also noteworthy that the commitment to socialist ideology increases with better educational attainment, indicating a strong influence of a sense of relative deprivation, as shown in Graph 2. Ironically, the lowest percentage of youth, subscribing to socialist ideology, is reported from the southern province, which has long been the main arena for the JVP-led, leftist political campaign. It is perhaps a reflection of the widespread impact of violent politics and the resulting polarisation of opinion.

Graph 2: Favoured Ideology by Education



The commitment to the value of equality is often accompanied by a strong sense of social injustice, deprivation and discrimination. In this regard, it is remarkable that the vast majority of Sri Lankan youth, 71%, are of the opinion that ours is not a just society as given in table 6. It is also noteworthy that the sense of social injustice increases with education. In fact, most of the youth with higher levels of educational attainment, nearly 80%, feel that Sri Lankan society is unjust. Many youth feel so strongly about what they consider to be unjust leading to a widespread feeling among them that even use of violence to achieve their objectives is legitimate. It follows that it is justifiable to fight or resist injustice.

Table 6: Do you Consider Our Society as Just *("Sadharana Samajaya*")*?

Group	Yes	No	Do not Know	Indifferent
All Group	20.7	71.2	7.4	0.8
Male	22.9	70.0	6.4	0.7
Female	17.8	72.6	8.6	1.0
Grade 1-5	27.1	61.9	11.0	0.0
Grade 6-11	24.2	67.3	7.7	0.8
Qualified to do A/L	17.4	75.6	5.9	1.1
Passed A/L	14.7	76.8	8.0	0.5
Degree or Higher education	12.7	79.7	6.3	1.3
No Schooling	22.2	55.6	22.2	0.0
Western	13.9	78.7	6.0	1.4
Central	19.4	71.3	9.0	0.3
Southern	17.9	75.4	5.9	0.8
Northern	20.1	59.8	20.1	
Eastern	47.9	41.2	10.8	
North-western	18.8	75.4	5.5	0.3
North-central	27.2	66.7	6.1	
Uva	22.2	68.9	6.1	2.8
Sabaramuwa	23.5	70.6	5.1	0.7

* *"Sadharana"* in Sinhala language carries such meanings as equitable and just. It is also understood as a political concept among the Sinhalese. For a detailed interpretation of the perceptions of Tamil youth on the concept of a just society see the article of C. Y. Thangarajah in this volume.

6.5. Participation in Public Affairs

It is due to the widespread interest among Sinhalese youth in public affairs that a political party like the JVP has been able to build a strong support base among underprivileged youth. These youths are committed to socialist ideals, feel that society is unjust and that they are discriminated by the privileged and the powerful. This is also evident from the fact that political party leaders do not enjoy much trust among youth in the country. This appears to be based on the widespread conviction that the present political process is framed to give undue privileges to the wealthy and the powerful and public goods are not distributed on merit. The following table illustrates whom youth perceive as benefiting from development activities.

Table 7: Who Benefits from Development?

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Only the well-to-do	511	17.7	17.8
Poor and needy also	497	17.2	17.3
Those with political /connections	1671	57.8	58.1
Known Parties	1	.0	.0
Politicians	1	.0	.0
Other	101	3.5	3.5
Don't know	95	3.3	3.3
Total	2877	99.5	100.0

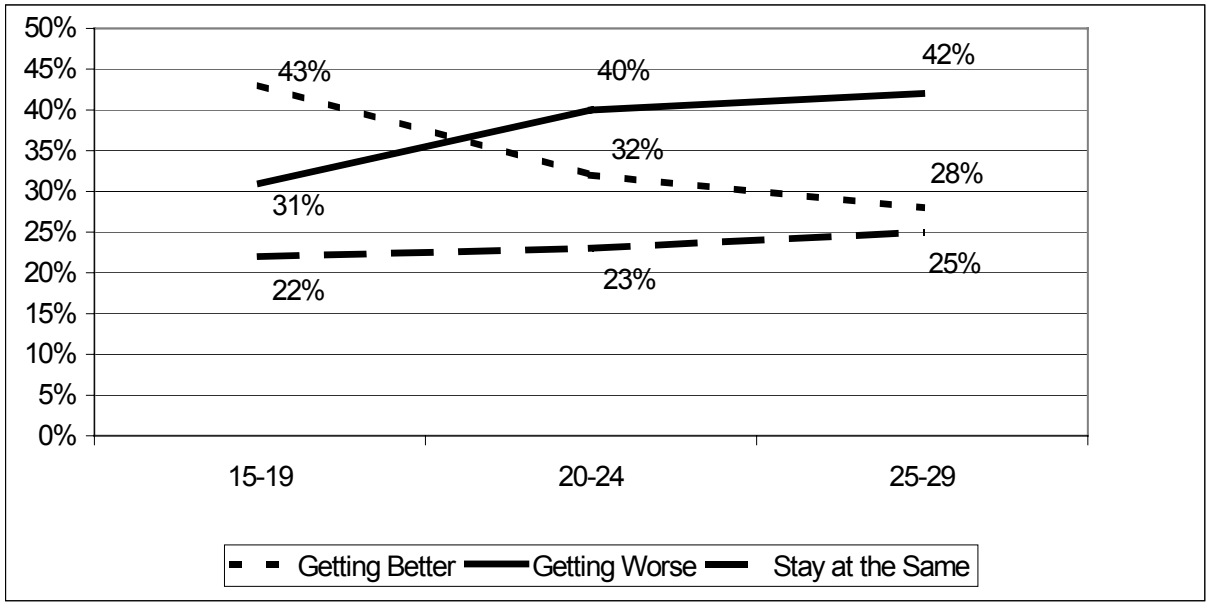
In spite of the above view, a large majority of youth not only recognise the value of their vote and have no hesitation to cast it at elections. In fact, 64% of the youth interviewed feel that their vote has an effect. They also feel strongly about important national issues like the on-going ethnic conflict. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of youth, 72%, does not feel that the ethnic conflict can be or should be solved militarily. Moreover, a large majority of youth feel the need to reach a negotiated settlement through dialogue. It is against the above background that we have to view the general assessment of the youth regarding the prevailing situation

in the country. It is noteworthy, as illustrated in table 8 that about a third of the youth interviewed feel that the situation in the country is getting better. An equal proportion of youth, however feel the situation in the country is getting worse. Graph 3 illustrates the future prospects of the country as perceived by youth from different age groups.

Table 8: Future Prospects of the Country by Province

Groups	Getting better	Getting worse	Stay the same	Do not know
All groups	36.6	35.5	22.8	5.1
Western	25.8	42.2	25.4	6.5
Central	34.0	37.8	21.5	6.6
Southern	33.7	34.9	24.2	7.1
Northern	32.3	49.1	18.6	-
Eastern	52.1	15.6	31.8	0.5
North-western	43.4	36.4	17.6	2.6
North-central	52.5	25.4	18.8	3.3
Uva	46.4	30.4	18.2	5.0
Sabaragamuwa	41.2	29.0	22.8	7.0

Graph 3: Future Prospects of the Country by Age



Given the above situation, it is not surprising that nearly one half of the youth interviewed feel that one should seek one's own advancement even by migrating to another country. This is perhaps not due to any lack of patriotism toward the country. It is probably due to the widespread feeling among youth, that all is not well with the management of affairs in the country.

Looking at the issue of gender equality, it is surprising to note that a majority of youth, 59%, feels that both men and women have equal opportunity in Sri Lanka, as shown in table 9. It is noteworthy that there is little difference in the perception of this issue between men and women.

Table 9: Do Men and Women Have the Same Rights and Opportunities in Sri Lanka? (%)

Group	Yes	No	Do not Know
All Group	58.3	41.4	0.3
Grade 1-5	43.6	55.6	0.9
Grade 6-11	62.1	37.6	0.3
Qualified to do A/L	57.9	42.1	0.0
Passed A/L	53.9	45.9	0.2
Degree / Higher education	48.7	51.3	0.0
No schooling	26.3	63.2	10.5
Male	59.6	39.9	0.4
Female	56.6	43.4	0.1
Western	57.3	42.3	0.4
Central	53.2	46.3	0.5
Southern	58.7	41.3	
Northern	49.4	50.6	
Eastern	62.7	37.3	
North-Western	57.6	41.8	
North-Central	65.7	34.3	
Uva	65.6	33.9	0.6
Sabaragamuwa	60.9		

6.6. Marriage and Sexuality

Turning to issues of sexuality and marriage, it should be noted that the attitudes of youth show both continuity and change. Moreover, Sri Lankan youth display a significant diversity in their attitude towards certain issues.

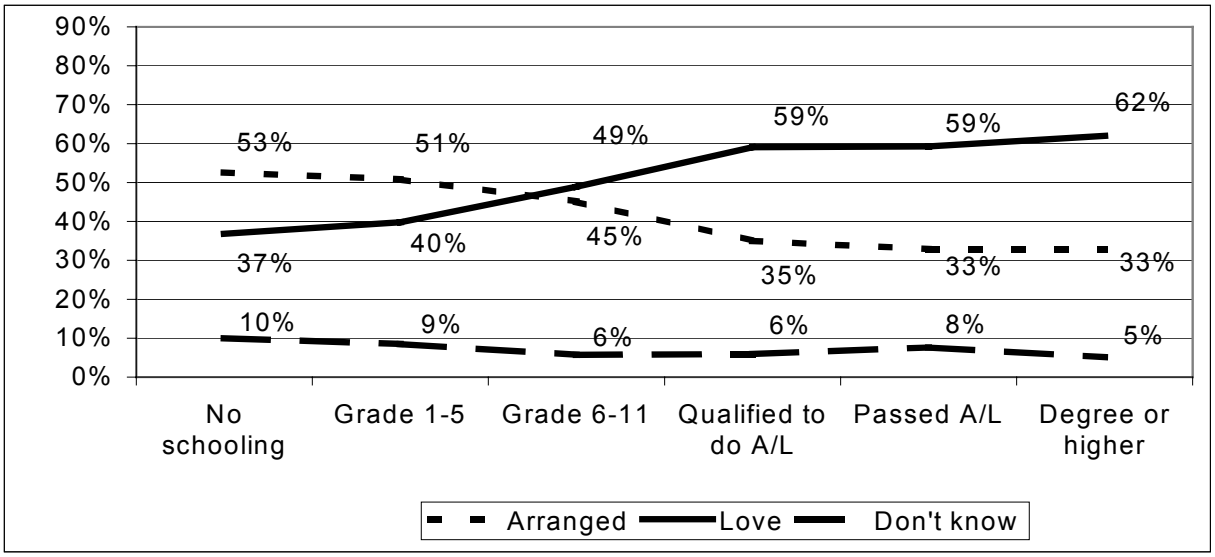
If we first take the issue of arranged marriage which has traditionally been the dominant form of marriage in the country, it is significant that, today, only 39% of the sample youth express their preference for it, as shown in table 10. While this is a significant proportion of youth, the fact that a majority of youth, 54%, have a preference for "love marriage" is noteworthy. It is also necessary to highlight the fact that the traditional form of marriage is still the most widely preferred form among certain social groups such as northern Tamil youth, and youth from the eastern province. By contrast, most youth in the more urbanised Western Province prefer "love marriage." It is also noteworthy that more educated youth also tend to prefer "love marriage" as illustrated in Graph 4.

Table 10: What Kind of Marriage do you Prefer? (%)

Groups	Arranged	Love	Living together	Do not know
All Groups	40.1	53.4	0.3	6.1
Western	23.7	69.9	0.4	6.0
Central	47.9	42.6	-	9.6
Southern	37.1	57.0	0.8	5.1
Northern	56.1	39.0	0.6	4.3
Eastern	56.2	39.0	0.6	4.3
North-Western	48.3	47.1	-	4.6
North-Central	46.4	45.3	0.6	7.7
Uva	45.6	49.4	0.6	4.4
Sabaragamuwa	41.5	55.1	-	3.3
15-19	45.0	48.6	0.2	6.2
20-24	34.3	59.8	0.6	5.3
25-29	38.9	52.9	-	8.2

Matching horoscopes of marital partners is another age-old practice prevalent in Sri Lanka. It is noteworthy that youth in the country are increasingly prepared to ignore this practice. 52% of the youth interviewed do not consider it as important at all. It is considered important by a large majority of Tamil youth, 70%, whereas it is not important at all for the vast majority of Muslims, 69%. Urban-rural differences are also very significant in this regard. It is considered unimportant by a large majority of urban respondents. This is not so in estate and rural areas. The importance of matching horoscopes is more pronounced in the former. There is also a gender difference here, more women than men treat it as important.

Graph 4: Preferred form of Marriage by Educational Attainment



It is highly significant that the overwhelming majority of respondents do not consider dowry as an essential aspect of marriage, as can be seen in table 11. In fact, 80% of them have expressed a negative opinion on the matter. Yet, we cannot ignore some of the variations in the responses of different youth groups. In this regard, differences between ethnic groups are significant. While only 17% of the Sinhala youth and 16% of Muslim youth consider dowry as an essential aspect of

marriage, nearly 30% of Tamil youth consider it as an essential element of marriage. It is also interesting that more women, 22%, than men, 17%, consider dowry as essential.

Table 11: Dowry as an Essential Part of Marriage (%)

Groups	Yes	No	Don't know
All groups	19.0	80.5	0.5
15-19	20.6	79.0	0.4
20-24	16.6	83.0	0.4
25-29	19.1	79.8	1.2
Urban	12.2	87.3	0.5
Rural	19.9	79.7	0.4
Estate	28.6	69.6	1.8
Male	16.9	82.5	0.7
Female	21.8	77.9	0.3
Sinhalese	17.2	79.3	0.4
Tamil	29.6	69.2	1.2
Moor	15.9	83.6	0.5
Malay	-	100.0	-
Burger	37.5	62.5	-
Grade 1-5	27.0	72.2	0.9
Grade 6-11	20.9	78.8	0.4
Qualified to do A/L	16.2	83.2	0.6
Passed A/L	14.8	84.5	0.7
Degree or higher	24.4	75.6	-
No schooling	21.1	73.7	5.3

6.7. Opinion on Other Issues Related to Marriage and Sexuality

When asked to express their opinion on a range of other social issues such as divorce, homosexuality, pre-marital sex, abortion, prostitution and the use of hard

drugs, the vast majority of youth have expressed negative opinions, disapproving such practices. The rates of negative responses are noted below in table 12.

Table 12: Negative Opinion on Contentious Social Issues

Issue	Rate of Negative Opinion
Divorce	65%
Homosexuality	81%
Pre-marital Sex	76%
Abortion	85%
Prostitution	89%
Use of hard drugs	93%

As is evident from the above data, in the case of certain issues, the negative response is overwhelming. In regard to divorce, 65% expressed a negative attitude toward it. It should be noted again that there are some significant variations across different youth groups. If we take the issue of hard drugs, the negative attitude is not as pronounced among youth in the estate sector, 65%, as in the case of urban, 91%, or rural youth, 95%.

On the issue of prostitution, there are some noteworthy differences among ethnic and religious groups. In regard to religious groups, it is more pronounced among Buddhists, 91%, and Roman Catholics, 89%, but less so among Hindus, 79%, and Muslims, 81%. As for gender, more women, 91%, than men, 87%, expressed a negative opinion. There is also a sectoral difference. While only 58% of estate youth expressed a negative opinion, the same opinion was expressed by as much as 90% of the youth in the other two sectors.

With regard to abortion, there are significant differences among religious groups, between men and women as well as across sectors. The difference between estate youth, on one hand urban and rural youth, on the other is striking. While only 55% of estate youth expressed negative opinion on abortion, the proportion of youth in

the other two sectors is as much as 88%. As regards religious groups, Buddhists and Roman Catholics express an overwhelmingly negative attitude (about 87%); among Hindus, the proportion is 76%, as against 79% among Muslim youth. More women, 88%, than men, 83%, hold a negative opinion on abortion as shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Non Approval of Abortion (Percentage)

Groups	Yes	No	Do not know
All groups	85.5	10.5	4.1
15-19	86.0	8.0	6.1
20-24	85.7	12.2	2.1
25-29	83.1	14.3	2.6
Urban	88.2	9.8	2.0
Rural	87.0	8.8	4.1
Estate	55.8	33.3	10.9
Male	83.0	12.7	4.2
Female	88.5	7.5	3.9
Sinhalese	87.5	8.7	3.8
Tamil	77.8	17.7	4.5
Moor	78.6	15.0	6.3
Malay	75.0	25.0	-
Burger	100.0	-	-
Grade 1-5	80.0	13.0	7.0
Grade 6-11	84.6	9.7	5.7
Qualified to do A/L	87.6	9.9	2.5
Passed A/L	86.8	12.2	1.0
Degree or higher	81.8	16.9	1.3
No schooling	73.7	5.3	21.1

As regards premarital sex, there are no significant differences among ethnic or religious groups as demonstrated in Table 14. On the other hand, gender difference is striking. While nearly 88% of women disapprove of premarital sex, only 67% of male youth subscribe to that opinion. On the other hand, only 56% of youth in the

estate sector disapprove of premarital sex, while nearly 80% of rural youth and 72% of urban youth express the same opinion.

Table 14: Opinion on Premarital Sexual Relationships (%)

Group	Object	Not object	Do not know
All groups	76.9	20.8	2.3
Western	71.9	26.5	1.7
Central	62.5	33.2	4.3
Southern	80.6	17.6	1.8
Northern	97.0	3.0	
Eastern	84.2	12.0	3.8
North-western	80.8	16.0	3.2
North-central	76.1	22.2	1.7
Uva	81.7	14.4	3.9
Sabaragamuwa	80.7	17.8	1.5

On the issue of homosexuality, educational attainment has a significant impact on the opinion of youths as demonstrated in Table 15. While nearly 90% of youth with higher educational qualifications hold a negative attitude towards it, the proportion of youth with primary education holding on to such a view is as low as 73%. There are some noteworthy differences among religious groups. Those with a negative attitude constitute about 70% among Hindus, while the corresponding proportions for Buddhists, Catholics and Muslims are 83.6%, 83.7%, and 78% respectively. More women, 86%, than men, 78%, have a negative attitude towards homosexuality. While only 50% of the estate youth hold a negative attitude towards homosexuality, the proportions for urban and rural youths are 86% and 83% respectively.

And finally, to look at youth attitudes towards divorce, there are some significant differences, between ethno-religious groups. The proportion of youth with a negative attitude towards divorce is as high as 73% among Muslims, and around 69% among Buddhist and Hindu respondents. While nearly 70% of female

respondents have expressed a negative attitude, the corresponding figure for men is 63%.

Table 15: Opinion on Homosexuality

Group	Object	Not object	Do not know
All groups	85.5	10.5	4.0
15-19	86.0	8.0	6.0
20-24	85.7	12.2	2.1
25-29	83.1	14.3	2.6
Male	83.0	12.7	4.2
Female	88.5	7.6	3.9
Western	87.4	9.1	3.5
Central	70.1	24.0	5.9
Southern	90.8	3.6	5.6
Northern	95.7	4.3	
Eastern	83.7	13.6	2.7
North-western	86.3	8.5	5.2
North-central	82.9	13.8	3.3
Uva	86.7	9.4	3.9
Sabaragamuwa	88.1	8.1	3.8

What is evident from the discussion on attitudes of youth towards social issues is that Sri Lankan youth in general have negative attitude towards most of the contentious issues discussed. Yet, what is equally important to note is that on many issues there are significant differences among youth coming from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, indicating the importance of social and cultural diversity as a factor shaping the attitudinal, value and behavioural orientations of youth in spite of the long-standing influence of modernising focus in the country.

7. Conclusions

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to provide an overview on the profiles, perspectives and socio-cultural orientations of Sri Lankan youth. On the basis of the analysis presented in the chapter, several major conclusions can be drawn.

Sri Lankan youth population is segmented on ethno-linguistic, regional and social class lines. These divisions, in turn, influence their life chances, the worldview and social and political orientations. Social, political and spatial segregation of youth belonging to different ethno-linguistic groups is further reinforced by the persisting language barrier that separates them. In spite of significant socio-economic changes in recent years, the gap between the desires and aspirations of youth, on one hand and what is increasingly prescribed to them, on the other persists as a critical issue.

A noteworthy aspect of the profile of the young population is to which extent they are economically dependent. While the overwhelming majority of younger members of the sample are either partly or wholly dependent on family members for their basic necessities, a sizeable segment of the older age group, 25-29 years, is also dependent. This is understandable in view of the persisting high rate of overall unemployment among youth, both women and men.

Self declared social class identity among Sri Lankan youth showed some interesting patterns as was discussed in this chapter. The vast majority of youth feel that they were members of the middle class. Only about a third felt that they belonged to the working or lower class. As is evident, class identity is highly correlated with educational attainment; with increasing education, they moved up the class ladder in terms of their identity.

Another important feature of the young population is their overwhelmingly monolingual character; most of them spoke only their own language. Though English is highly valued and emphasised in Sri Lankan society both as a status marker and a valuable asset in the competition for much desired urban, white collar employment, particularly in the private sector, fluency of English is confined to a tiny minority. The overwhelming majority of youth do not have even a reasonable working knowledge of the English language.

Moving into the area of social and cultural orientations of youth, it is clear that there is a high degree of ethno-linguistic and spatial segregation of youth in most parts of the Country. This often breeds ethnocentrism, which is not a very positive factor in a multi-ethnic society. This is also evident from the strong tendency among youth to find it problematic to locate a marital partner outside one's ethnic group. The same also applies to caste, which is an important consideration in the selection of marital partners among a majority of youth.

A remarkably high degree of religiosity among youth is another important aspect. Even in the most urbanised western province about 75% of the youth declare themselves to be religious. In the northern and eastern provinces the proportion is over 90%.

The notion of social justice is very strong among Sri Lankan youth, e.g. the vast majority of the Sri Lankan youth subscribing to the view that our society is characterised by social injustice *(Asadharana)*. As is well known, this is a popular slogan often used by militant youth. This is very much in keeping with the dominant ideological orientation of youth as well. They are very much committed to an egalitarian ideology as is evident from the survey data.

Dwindling trust that youth have in public institutions, elected bodies, representatives and public servants is another major issue according to the survey (see paper by Laksiri Fernando in this volume). Restoration of public confidence may not be easily accomplished. Nevertheless, this may be a critical need as youth are often compelled to deal with the same institutions, officials and representatives in their day-to-day lives.

"Development" is often justified by political leaders as the main vehicle taking various benefits to the larger population. Yet, if the vast majority of the youth believe that development process benefits disproportionately the well to do and the politically powerful, it leads to serious erosion of legitimacy of the "developmental state".

Youths' interest in public affairs remains very high despite their disillusionment with mundane politics. While the latter is perhaps a reflection of their dismay with the behaviour of many politicians, they also seem to realise that the proper management of public affairs is crucial for the wellbeing of the ordinary people and the socio-economic progress of the country. On the other hand, many youths are not hopeful that the country's situation is getting better. In fact, many of them feel that the situation in the country is getting worse. There is no doubt that this is at least partly a reflection of the on-going ethnic conflict in the country.

What should the individuals do against the above background? On this issue, youth are divided. Nearly half of them feel that one should seek one's own advancement even by migrating to another country. Others apparently do not think that it is a desirable option. Once again, these views are no doubt influenced by the prevailing situation in the country. It is perhaps a reflection of the times. With increasing globalisation, more and more people tend to look beyond the shores of one's own country.

This first part was devoted to a discussion on youth attitudes towards contentious social issues. In this regard, it is noteworthy that they display a rather complex picture with respect to their attitudes. On one hand, a majority of youth is rather unconventional with regard to social issues as dowry, divorce, arranged marriages, etc. On the other hand, by and large they have "conservative" attitudes towards such issues as pre-marital sex and homosexuality.

Part II: Policy Perspectives

Social scientists in general would complain that their research is often not taken into account when policy decisions are made in diverse fields. They feel that politicians, public officials and business leaders are influenced more by vested interests and their own biases rather than systematic social research in their day-to-day activities. So, unless social scientists use their research findings to mobilise public opinion through their own professional bodies, civic organisations and the mass media, their research is much less likely to have an impact on public policy and corporate decision making, particularly when research results point to the need to take measures that are unfavourable to vested interests.

On the other hand, many research studies do not go beyond university libraries, classrooms, academic conferences and the bookshelves of research sponsoring agencies. They rarely figure in public debates. In many countries, there is no institutionalised system whereby research findings are brought to the notice of those who are in a position to make use of them. There are also situations where research findings are not conclusive and do not indicate an unambiguous path to follow. In some cases, research can be too controversial to act upon.

Research on youth has been undertaken in many countries for several decades now. Much of the early research has focused on what have been referred to as youth problems such as alienation, unrest, anti-social behaviour, violence, addictions, crime, and suicide. Youth were increasingly viewed as individuals with "problems" and requiring assistance, advice and guidance. More recently, there has been a shift in the way the youth question is conceptualised, looking at youth as a constituency with their own perspectives on society, and the adult world in particular. This latter approach treats youth as social critics. It became more and more significant as youth movements gained greater visibility in the wider society. In fact, in some situations, youth movements became trendsetters, challenging the status quo, as was the case in the Western counter-culture movement in the 1960's. Elsewhere, radical youth movements compelled governments to introduce reforms in many fields. This does not mean that they have always been effective and successful. In fact, some conservative political regimes did hit back hard, often destroying many young lives and suppressing entire movements. On the other hand, under more favourable conditions, youth movements have succeeded in establishing useful strategic alliances with other groups and constituencies and have consolidated their position to the extent of being able to pose a serious challenge to even a hegemonic regime.

Globalisation and the connected social and cultural changes are also effecting youth in different parts of the world, including Sri Lanka. An important aspect lies in the fact that the biographical phase between youth and adulthood is more and more prolonged. This is mainly due to the fact that, on the one hand the period of formal education is being extended, and on the other hand, access to appropriate employment opportunities is getting more difficult for many youth. The ambivalence of a social status between economic dependency (in case of Sri Lanka mainly, on their parents) and the desire for socio-cultural autonomy (mainly expressed in the form of often violent anti-systemic movements) creates new

pressure on many youth to define their identities and positions in society. Those youth, who are sidelined by the modernisation process despite better educational achievements, are most likely to feel marginalised, if not even discriminated within the new global arena.

It is against the above background that the National Survey on youth should be viewed. Its primary aim has been to shed light on our understanding of Sri Lankan youth. Given the highly vociferous and forceful manner in which politically organised youth groups in the country have given expression to their views, ideas, aspirations, criticisms and demands, it would be naïve to treat them simply as misguided youth. Their perspectives on social, economic, political and cultural issues deserve serious attention. In fact, they often mirror serious ills and anomalies in society.

Given the above state of affairs, the need for a better understanding of youth cannot be overemphasised. Here, there is no substitute for systematically planned and executed national sample surveys. It is only a comprehensive data set compiled on the basis of such a survey that can paint a reasonable picture of the young population in the country in terms of their actual profiles and their social, cultural and political perspectives and orientations. Against this backdrop an attempt is made to focus attention on several key issues. They are as follows:

a) Taking youth seriously
b) Narrowing the gap between different youth constituencies
c) Building capacities of youth and ensuring equal opportunities
d) Combating discrimination and injustice

a) Taking youth seriously

Whether one takes youth seriously or not depends on one's understanding of and attitudes towards, youth. If one equates youths with behavioural problems such as risk taking, violence, drug abuse, etc. one may be tempted to adopt a patronising attitude towards them (e.g. youth need protection, guidance and support of adults and public institutions). On the other hand, if we take the views, ideas and perceptions of youth with the seriousness they usually deserve, then, one may realise that youth can play a constructive role in changing or reforming society, or institutions. The "change of heart" however is not easy, particularly in view of the longstanding social attitudes towards youth and traditional youth-adult relationships in many societies. On the other hand, youth studies that allow youths to express their views openly can play an important mediatory role by bringing to the surface how youth feel about the world around them.

It is clear that youths have certain ideological tendencies, perceptions and socio-cultural orientations, at least some of which may be incongruent with those of their parents and adults in general. On the other hand, many youths have become victims of certain past policies, in such fields as education and language. These and other matters need to figure in public discussions and policy debates at the highest level. This could only happen if we are prepared to take youth seriously, rather than simply appease them by offering conventional youth services. This is not to suggest that many services and programs offered to youth by various institutions are not useful but to emphasise the fact that many youth expect a more constructive response to their predicament.

b) Narrowing the Gap between Youth Constituencies

It seems reasonable to assume that in no society, youth constitute a homogenous entity. They may be segmented on ethno-linguistic, class, religious and other lines. This diversity in itself should not constitute an issue. On the other hand, the perpetuation and reinforcement of deep divisions may lead to conflict of interests and ideas, particularly when the groups involved are placed in a mutually competitive situation.

In Sri Lanka, major divisions among youth are based on ethnicity, class, language, ideology and rural-urban differences. These divisions have created in the minds of many youth a strong sense of deprivation, marginalisation, discrimination and social injustice. So, the narrowing of the gap between different youth constituencies remains a critical policy issue. It should also be noted that, to address this issue effectively, refashioning of public policies in several related areas may be a prerequisite. For instance, promotion of bilingualism or multilingualism in place of rampant monolingualism among upwardly mobile youth belonging to all ethnic communities is essential to ensure equality of opportunity and address the sense of discrimination and deprivation prevalent among underprivileged youth.

Another important imperative would be to avoid further politicisation in regard to the distribution of socio-economic resources as this was clearly expressed as one of the main sources of grievance among many youth. On the other hand, many youth might find it difficult to face more competitive situations, which make them vulnerable to pressures emanating from extremist movements, built on ethnic or regional identities. Establishment of politically independent local institutions would be one important prerequisite to accommodate youth and provide them with a forum where they can not only air their grievances but also build their own capacities.

Sri Lankan population is generally divided into urban, and rural and estate categories. This makes sense, as there are significant differences between these divisions. While urban areas are far more privileged in terms of life chances and social infrastructure, rural areas have lagged behind over many years. Estate sector has traditionally been the most underprivileged. As is well known in Sri Lanka, all the best educational institutions are concentrated in cities and towns. On the other hand, rural schools are generally poorly equipped. Estate schools are even worse, often with least physical infrastructure and qualified teachers. In rural and estate schools, opportunities for learning languages other than one's own are almost non-existent. It is in this sense that there are wide variations across sectoral boundaries that undermine the principle of equality of opportunity. This is an important issue requiring a decisive policy response.

Finally, the general sense of alienation among youth has to be addressed urgently. This is especially relevant for the North and East in view of various security measures that impinge on the day-to-day lives of youth. The general suspect image of youth by armed forces or militant groups not only exposes youth as victims but also stigmatises them against other communities.

Given the long-standing and pressing issues referred to in this section, a permanent national commission independent of political influences and interferences might be a very useful forum for addressing youth issues.

c) Building Capacities of Youth and Ensuring Equality of Opportunity

Survey data on youth aspirations, interests and role models indicate that many Sri Lankan youth do not have opportunities for pursuing challenging life goals. Many youth do not have role models. Even most of those who have role models to emulate mention such figures as sportsmen and sportswomen, family members,

actors, etc. They have rarely mentioned professionals, scientists, entrepreneurs or social activists.

Most of the youth prefer conventional government jobs, which may not necessarily be a challenging option. It certainly provides a sense of security and stability but rarely allows one to take self-initiatives. The examination based school education often leaves little room for the development of critical faculties of students. Such education usually alienates youth from the world of work and other real life situations. This situation needs to be remedied in order to enable youth to develop their own capacities.

d) Combating the Widespread Sense of Discrimination

It is significant that about a third of the youth interviewed state that there is caste-based discrimination in their areas. It is also remarkable that such discrimination is there even in the most urbanised Western Province. This may be partly due to the fact that many members of the urban elite are also caste-conscious and therefore, likely to favour their own kind in various situations. There is, of course, very little empirical evidence on inter-caste relations in urban settings and therefore, no firm conclusions can be made with respect to the nature of caste discrimination that prevails there. It is very clear that certain regions have a much higher incidence of caste-based discrimination. While the Northern Province, where the largest Tamil minority is concentrated is very prominent in this regard, it is also significant in such predominantly Sinhalese rural areas like the Southern Province.

Caste discrimination is often subtle and cannot be easily eradicated. It takes place in family, kinship and community settings in an informal manner. Nevertheless, youth are affected by it and are, therefore conscious of its consequences. It is an area that needs attention and closer scrutiny.

Another arena where many youth state that there is discrimination is the private sector. Discrimination here may be based on a range of factors. If more and more youths continue to experience or perceive discrimination by the private sector, agitations against economic reforms are likely to grow in intensity. Moreover, it can also contribute to unrest among upwardly mobile youth with attendant adverse consequences.

The inability of many youth to compete for white-collar jobs in the private sector may well be due to non-possession of cultural capital, which usually plays a major role in the corporate employment market. Some of the attributes, which the private sector is looking for, cannot be easily acquired by underprivileged youth. This naturally creates the need for revamping education and opportunity structures in order to make the latter more open and accessible. While there is no simple remedy, educational planners and others responsible for resource allocation have a crucial role to play in order to find ways and means of addressing the issue of equality of opportunity in training, education and employment provision. Given the increasing emphasis placed on the private, corporate sector in a liberal economic environment, it is imperative to raise the consciousness of the private sector employers to the same level as that of liberal socially conscious politicians.

References

Education and Youth Affairs Department, Macau (2001): *5th International Symposium on Asian Youth Studies*, Macau.

Fornas, J and G. Bolin (eds.), (1995): *Youths Culture in Late Modernity*, Sage Publishers: London.

Gamage, S. and I.B. Watson (eds.), (1999): *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka*, Sage Publications: New Delhi.

Hettige, S.T. (ed.) (1996): *Unrest or Revolt: Some Aspects of Youth Unrest in Sri Lanka*, German Cultural Institute: Colombo.

Hettige, S.T. (1997): *Globalisation and Local Culture: The Case of Sri Lanka*, Mimeo.

Hettige, S.T. (ed.), (1998): *Globalisation, Social Change and Youth*, German Cultural Institute and CASS: Colombo.

Hettige, S.T., M. Mayer and A. Abeysuriya (eds.), (2001): *Globalisation, Electronic Media and Cultural Change: The Case of Sri Lanka*, German Cultural Institute and CASS: Colombo.

Lakshman, W. D. and C.A. Tisdell (eds.), (2000): *Sri Lanka's Development since Independence: Socio Economic Perspectives and Analyses*, Nova Science Publishers: New York.

A Holistic View of Youth Unemployment in Sri Lanka: An Exploratory Study

W. D. Lakshman

1. Introduction

Higher than average unemployment among the youth is a world-wide phenomenon. Because of its peculiarities and multi-faceted significance, the subject has elicited immense academic and policy interest. Sri Lanka is an interesting case of a developing country with extensive youth unemployment. From the time the relevant statistical information has been available, the rate of unemployment among the youth in Sri Lanka is known to have remained several times that of the average rate of unemployment for the country. A large proportion of the youth in unemployment has also been relatively highly educated. The bulk of the unemployed youth, as first time job seekers, are usually compelled to wait long before they eventually find a job. This particular pattern of unemployment in the country has given rise to extensive concern at the political level. Many were the policy measures adopted in the past to meet this continuing problem, albeit with limited results.

Unless otherwise specified, the youth is treated, in what follows, as those in the age range of 15-29 years. The more widely prevalent international practice is to treat only the 15-25 years old as youth. The 15-29 year definition has been adopted partly because YS (2000), which provides part of the data for this paper, takes the 26-29 age group also as part of youth. Required effort to eliminate the 26-29 group from, or to separately indicate that group in, the YS (2000) statistical information presented in this paper would not have produced commensurately better analytical

results. In addition, to treat 26-29 as part of youth in Sri Lanka, does not appear to be all that awkward despite the international practice being different[1].

Causes, effects and implications of the youth-biased pattern of unemployment are, no doubt, multi-faceted. Yet the tendency has been to examine and analyse these separately by economists, management scientists, educationists, sociologists, political scientists and so on, within the prevailing system of disciplinary boundaries, each analyst highlighting factors which receive prominence in his/ her own disciplinary training. The frame of reference of the present paper, however, is inter-disciplinary. It is an exploratory and preliminary exercise, which needs to be supplemented by further studies. The initial idea of undertaking a study of this nature came from the availability of data for use from the Sri Lanka National Youth Survey conducted in year 1999. Pitfalls of questionnaire survey data are well known. These data weaknesses would become particularly serious when the survey concerned has had nothing to do, at its planning stage, with the study which eventually uses the data generated by the said survey.

This paper intends to examine, as the proposed title indicates, three broad aspects about youth unemployment in Sri Lanka: (a) the nature of youth unemployment, (b) important factors behind the phenomenon, and (c) its important implications. No attempt is made; however, to classify the material discussed separately into these three thematic groups. The study is based on national survey data, particularly those from the *Quarterly Labour Force Survey* of the Department of Census and Statistics and as already noted, those from the above mentioned YS (2000). The study is constrained by the subject coverage of data that is available.

[1] There are a few exceptions to this 15-25 year international norm in the definition of youth [see e.g. O'Higgins (2001: 10)]. Some of the implied peculiarities in Sri Lanka may be noted. The majority of those who gain admission to universities in Sri Lanka would now be graduating after age 25. There is the widely spread family tradition among all ethnic and religious groups to consider even those in the 26-29 age group as youth, as long as they are unemployed / unmarried.

The author hopes that this study will stimulate other studies on more narrowly defined themes.

The paper is presented in several sections. After this introduction, there is a brief section on the general problem of unemployment in the country to provide the backdrop for this study. Section III introduces the reader to the nature and characteristics of the problem of youth unemployment in Sri Lanka. In several sections after III, a number of aspects of the problem of youth unemployment in Sri Lanka are examined. These constitute a mixture of characteristics, causal factors and implications of youth unemployment in the country. I move across disciplinary boundaries at will in the analysis, bringing into discussion associated economic, social, educational, cultural and political factors. The final section attempts to draw some policy insights emanating from the analysis.

2. Unemployment in Sri Lanka: The Backdrop

During the post-Independence period in Sri Lanka, one observes "the emergence of chronic large scale unemployment...due to the contrast between the fast growth of population and the inertia of the economy in the face of adverse trends in the economy" [ILO (1971): 17]. Open unemployment has been identified as a major problem in Sri Lanka since around the end of the 1950s. A consistently observed characteristic feature of the problem of unemployment in Sri Lanka has been its high overall rate. Extensively spread high unemployment and under-employment have remained a serious economic, social and political problem in the country for quite some time. The unemployment problem has had certain peculiar structural characteristics, of which three may be highlighted.

First, ever since the commencement of the practice of systematic collection of data on unemployment, the greater incidence of unemployment among females than

among males has been highlighted (Tables 1 and 2). The sex differential has persisted irrespective of whether the overall unemployment rate was rising or falling. The female rate of unemployment was 2-3 times that of the male rate in the recent past.

Table 1: The Percentage of Unemployment by Sector and Sex, 1981/2, 1986/7 and 1996/7

	1981/82				1986/87				1996/97			
	SL	**US**	**RS**	**ES**	**SL**	**US**	**RS**	**ES**	**SL**	**US**	**RS**	**ES**
Male	7.8	10.1	7.3	6.4	11.3	12.9	11.1	9.5	6.4	8.3	6.1	6.1
Female	21.3	25.1	25.3	3.6	23.6	25.6	26.2	9.8	17.5	23.9	17.7	7.9
Total	11.7	14.2	12.0	5.0	15.5	17.3	16.0	9.7	10.4	13.4	10.2	6.9

Notes: SL = Whole country; US = Urban sector; RS = Rural sector; ES = Estate sector.
Source: Central Bank (1999)

Second, as a natural result of the concentration of population in rural areas, the bulk of the numbers unemployed also is found in those areas. In the first quarter of 2000, 86 per cent of the total unemployed (the same percentage for both males and females), according to Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) of the Department of Census and Statistics, were in the rural sector. Table 1 presents a summary of the Central Bank's Consumer Finance and Socio-economic Survey (CFSES) data for the three most recent survey years, on the rate of unemployment in the three sectors – rural, urban and estate. According to these statistics, the rate of unemployment has consistently been higher in urban and rural sectors than in the estate sector. The urban sector rate was higher than that of the rural sector in respect of the overall rate, though for male and female components of the labour force no particular pattern could be discerned.

Third, unemployment is heavily concentrated among young age groups. Being the primary focus of this paper, youth unemployment and its various features of policy significance are examined in the rest of this paper.

3. Nature and Characteristics of Youth Unemployment

As already noted, the heavy concentration of unemployment among young age groups has attracted a great deal of analytical and policy level attention since the early 1970s. Statistical information on unemployment classified by age and sex is presented in Table 2 for a few recent years. The overall rate (i.e. covering both sexes) of unemployment among the two age groups, 15-19 and 20-24, taken separately, was between 2-2.5 times that of the overall rate during the early years shown in the Table. Since 1997 the rate for these age groups has risen to around three times the overall rate.

According to Table 3, more than 75 per cent of total unemployment is found among the three age groups 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29. In fact, the share of these young persons among the total number unemployed has gradually increased over the years - 76 percent in 1985/6, 78 per cent in 1991, 79 per cent in 1994 and 83 per cent in 2000.

Due to either differences in definitions (of employment, unemployment etc.) adopted or differences in the rigor with which the adopted definitions were applied in practice, the comparison of the levels of youth unemployment estimated from official (i.e. Department of Census and Statistics) data sources and from YS (2000) can be quite confusing[2]. The ratios from the latter are significantly higher than those from the former. For example, the YS (2000) estimates the unemployment rates for the 15-19 and 20-25 age groups at 59 and 50 per cent respectively. The rate of unemployment among the youth belonging to the 15-19 and 20-24 age groups, according to the *Quarterly Labour Force Survey* is

[2] YS focuses more on self-perception of the youth regarding their employment status, as against the DCS attempts to indicate the numbers unemployed on some objective criteria. The unemployment numbers shown in YS (2000) would cover those who are unemployed and/or are not satisfied with present employment and therefore are looking for a job.

respectively 22 and 25 per cent in 2000. Large numbers of persons in the "under-employed" category, engaged in occupations considered of temporary interest have recorded themselves as unemployed in the YS (2000).

Table 2: Unemployment Rate by Age as a Per cent of Labour Force

Age Group	1991: 4th Q			1994: 4th Q			1997: 4thQ			2000: 1stQ[a]		
	Total	Male	Fem.	Total	Male	Fem.	Total	Male	Fem.	Total	Male	Fem.
All Ages	13.7	9.6	21.2	12.1	9.8	17.0	10.3	7.7	15.4	8.0	6.4	11.1
10-14	33.3	12.5	51.9	7.1	6.5	8.3	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]
15-19	31.2	32.8	28.9	32.3	29.3	38.5	34.8	30.9	40.1	22.1	20.5	25.3
20-24	35.8	27.3	47.7	31.3	27.5	37.9	28.0	23.5	35.0	24.5	21.9	28.9
25-29	16.0	11.5	23.0	13.1	7.4	22.7	15.3	11.6	21.5	12.7	7.0	18.6
30-39	8.7	3.7	18.2	7.9	5.7	12.0	4.9	2.9	8.9	3.8	2.4	7.3
40-49	3.8	3.4	4.6	2.3	2.8	1.1	1.3	1.0	1.9	1.1	1.2	1.7
50-59	0.2	0.3	0.0	3.5	4.5	0.0	0.4	0.5	0.0	1.0	1.1	0.3
60 & over	0.6	0.7	0.0	1.5	1.8	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.0	...	...	...

Notes: Less than 0.05

a) According to the Youth Survey, the rates of unemployment for the three youth age groups are substantially higher than are shown in this Table. The relevant percentages are as follows: 15-19 age group 59.1%, 20-25 group 50.1% and 26-29 group 36.3%. The overall rate for youth unemployment according to YS (2000) was 50.3 per cent.

b) Statistical practice has changed after 1994 in how this age group is treated. Recognising the reality that a proportion of children of this age is employed, the recorded number employed from this age group has continued to be included in the labour force. But the practice of indicating a number falling into this age category as unemployed has been abandoned after 1994. Hence the absence of a rate of unemployment among those in the 10-14 age group in 1997 and after. Sources: QLFS (various).

4. Spatial and Sector-wise Distribution

Widely heard is the criticism that economic activities, and therefore employment opportunities, created and promoted under market-led growth processes in the country since the late 1970s, have been concentrated heavily in favour of urban areas and areas where specially designed development projects were located[3]. Two Tables, 4 and 5, present the YS (2000) data on two aspects of the spatial distribution of rates of youth unemployment. Of these the former confirms the urban-rural pattern shown in national data from official sources, and thus the urban bias hypothesis.

Table 3: Pattern of Distribution of Unemployment by Age Group: Selected Years

Age Group	1991[a]	1994[a]	1997[a]	2000: 1stQ[b]
15-19	19.3	22.4	22.5	16.6
20-24	42.2	41.2	41.5	45.8
25-29	16.7	15.6	19.0	20.7
30-39	15.8	15.5	12.7	12.3
40-49	4.8	3.9	3.4	2.8
50 & above	1.2	1.6	0.9	1.9
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note:

- Average of the data for the four quarters of the given year.
- According to the Youth Survey, youth unemployment is divided into three relevant age categories as follows: 15-19 age group 34.5%, 20-25 group 53% and 26-29 group 12.5%. The relevant proportions for slightly different age groups shown in this Table

[3] The virtually untranslatable Sinhala expression – *colombata kiri, gamata kakiri* – poignantly expresses this bias of economic processes of this period in favour of the cities and against rural areas. The Sinhala expression, effectively using the rhyme in the words involved, literally means that market-based economic processes have provided "*kiri* (meaning milk implying superior things) to Colombo and only *kekiri* (a cheap vegetable meaning, in this context, inferior things) to the village".

according to the above statistics would be 15-19 – 20%, 20-24 – 55.1% and 25-29 – 24.9%. Sources: Quarterly Report of the Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey (various).

Table 4: Sector Wise Distribution of Youth Unemployment, 2000

Sector	Rate of Unemployment	Sector-wise Distribution of the Unemployed (%)
Urban	41.08	14.76
Rural	53.33	79.75
Estate	42.48	5.49
Total	50.40	100.00

Source: Youth Survey, 2000

The presence of sharp regional differences in the pattern of distribution of youth unemployment has been subjected to widespread economic, social and political discussion. According to the Youth Survey, for 21 administrative districts[4], the rate of unemployment varies from the lowest District average of 35.14 per cent in Amparai District to the highest 71.74 per cent in Hambantota District. It is rather difficult to see any distinct pattern in the variation of rates of unemployment by Districts.

It is difficult to interpret the District distribution data in Table 5; however, using the highly plausible hypothesis that economic processes of the last couple of decades have favoured more urbanised and policy-favoured Districts. The group of Districts with the lowest youth unemployment rates can hardly be described as favoured by recent policies. The second District group, in terms of the rate of youth unemployment in ascending order, contains two Western Province Districts – Colombo and Gampaha. It also contains three rather under-privileged Districts, which have been subject to relative policy neglect during the last couple of decades – Badulla, Nuwara Eliya, and Trincomalee. Similarly, although three of the four Districts in the fourth group may be treated as under-developed and

under-privileged, it is debatable whether Kandy would be treated as a least developed District in the country.

I have argued above that the number of unemployed youth, as shown in the Youth Survey, is likely to consist of a reasonable percentage of under-employed youth, "waiting" for their preferred occupation, in addition to the genuinely unemployed. This is particularly likely to be the case with the relatively more educated persons among the youth. The under-privileged Districts of the country and those, which have not been favoured by location decisions pertaining to large development projects of the recent past, are likely to be less endowed with the type of occupations preferred by the youth. The length of time, which young persons are willing to wait for occupations of 'higher rating' too is likely to be less in those Districts. Hence the lower rates of recorded youth unemployment in certain such Districts in Table 5 than in the more urbanised and relatively more developed Districts of the country. One wonders, however, whether the above interpretation can be applied to Hambantota, the District with the highest District rate of youth unemployment. That it is one of the least developed regions is well known. It recent times, however, Hambantota has been the home for the intervention of some well-funded foreign-sponsored projects like the Integrated Rural Development Project (IRDP) for the District. Since the beginning of the 1990s, governmental programmes for the Southern Province development received considerable publicity. A Cabinet portfolio was created recently to promote and manage developmental activities in the Southern Province. These initiatives appear to have promoted the aspirations of the youth of the Hambantota District, more rapidly than the expansion of productive activities and 'modern' type of occupations.

[4] Of the total of 25 Districts, the Youth Survey had covered only 21. Excluded from the Survey were districts of Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi.

Table 5: Districts in Selected Ranges of Youth Unemployment Rate (%)

Range in the Rate of Youth Unemployment	Administrative Districts	Average Unemployment Rate
Less than 40	Amparai	35.14
	Jaffna	35.96
	Ratnapura	36.79
40 - less than 50	Badulla	42.47
	Nuwara Eliya	43.40
	Kurunegala	45.74
	Colombo	46.67
	Gampaha	47.06
	Trincomalee	47.37
50 - less than 60	Matale	50
	Puttalum	50
	Galle	50.55
	Kalutara	52.78
	Batticaloa	55
	Moneragala	55.56
	Anuradhapura	56
	Polonnaruwa	58.14
60 and above	Kandy	64.55
	Matara	65.38
	Kegalle	67.14
	Hambantota	71.74

Source: Youth Survey, 2000

5. First-time Job-Seekers among the Unemployed and Period of Waiting for Employment

Subject to problems of interpretation and reliability of data, QLFSs indicate that first-time job seekers constitute a very large proportion of total unemployment – 82 per cent for the 4th quarter of 1997, 77 per cent in the 3rd quarter of 1998 and 82 per cent in the 1st quarter of 2000. The relevant proportions for men and women were respectively 80 and 84 per cent for 1997, 76 and 79 per cent for 1998 and 79 and 86 per cent for 2000. In 1991, the large numbers who fell into this category of the unemployed, were distributed between the rural and urban sectors, roughly in correspondence with the population proportions falling into these sectors, 75 and

25 per cent respectively (Table 6). By the 4th quarter of 1997, these proportions have changed respectively to 91 and 9 per cent and by the first quarter of 2000, to 89 and 11 per cent. The changing structure of occupations associated with growing globalisation is probably to the greater disadvantage of the rural youth in search of jobs than the urban youth in that category. Increasing emphasis on globalisation, therefore, makes it increasingly more difficult for the rural youth to secure their "first" job in their working life than the urban youth. It needs no special mention that almost all the unemployed first-time job seekers belong to years 15-29 age group.

Table 6: Pattern of Distribution of the Unemployed who never had a Job by Residential Sector: Selected Years as Per cent of total unemployment

Residential Sector	1991 4th Q	1992 4th Q	1994: 4th Q	1997: 4th Q	2000: 1st Q
Urban	24.4	25.1	23.5	9.2	11.0
Rural	75.6	74.9	76.5	90.8	89.0

Source: Quarterly Report of the Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey (various)

Another significant aspect of the youth concentration characteristic of the country's unemployment problem is brought out in Table 7. Not only were the overwhelming bulk of them first-time job seekers. A very large proportion of them has been waiting for long periods to secure their first ever job in life. As World Bank (1999: ii) argues there are strong job preferences among the unemployed in Sri Lanka, making the numbers 'unemployed and willing to take up "any job"' much less than the total reported numbers of unemployed. The country's labour market – as anywhere else in the world – is segmented. Jobs in certain sectors and, even in the same sector, certain types of occupations, are not preferred by large numbers of jobless persons, particularly the more educated segments of the labour force. According to the existing family structure, parents support their unemployed children, financially and otherwise, during the period of their job-search. Persons who have reached relatively high levels of educational attainment, therefore,

appear to be willing and able to wait relatively long periods for jobs of their choice.

Table 7: Pattern of Distribution of the Unemployed by Duration of Unemployment and Sex Breakdown: Selected Years as per cent of total unemployment

Waiting Period	1991: Q4	1992: Q4	1994: Q4	1997: Q4	2000: Q1
Less than 6 months	14.4	7.4	16.9	10.3	12.0
Male				10.0	15.2
Female				10.5	8.3
6-less than 12 months	9.4	14.0	10.0	11.1	11.6
Male				12.6	9.8
Female				9.7	13.7
12 months & more	76.2	78.6	73.1	78.6	76.4
Male				77.4	75.0
Female				79.8	78.0

Source: Quarterly Report of the Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey (various)

Table 8: The Composition of Numbers Unemployed by the Period of Waiting for a Job and by Occupations Desired as percentages out of each category

Occupation Desired	Less than 6 Months		6-less than 12 Months		12 months and more	
	1998	2000	1998	2000	1998	2000
Managerial	...	...	...	...	100.0	...
Professional	8.7	16.6	11.9	15.5	79.5	67.9
Technical	13.9	21.2	20.2	20.5	65.8	58.6
Clerical	6.7	7.1	14.5	10.2	78.8	82.7
Sales and Services	29.6	3.3	20.2	16.9	50.2	79.8
Skilled agricultural & fisheries workers	38.7	...	20.7	...	40.6	...
Craft & Related Workers	11.7	9.9	8.8	6.2	79.5	83.9
Plant & Machine Operators	17.9	26.4	5.0	7.1	77.2	66.6
Elementary Occupations	24.3	16.8	17.7	8.4	58.1	74.8
Other	7.4	12.2	10.8	13.8	81.8	74.0
Total	11.4	12.0	12.1	11.6	76.5	76.4

Source: QLFS, 3rd Quarter 1998 & 1st Quarter 2000

Tables 8 and 9 are about the pattern of job preferences in the society and the actual structure of jobs generated by the economy. The available statistical compilations of the QLFSs do not match this information with information about educational attainment levels of the unemployed. The information in these two Tables refers to the widely discussed question of structural mismatches in Sri Lanka's unemployment, particularly youth unemployment. This is taken up for discussion separately in a sub-section later. We may merely note here that there is a significant mismatch between the pattern of jobs the economy creates and the pattern of job preferences of those waiting to be employed. In relation to what the economy demands, there is an over-supply of labour for professional and white collar type of jobs and an under-supply for manual and elementary jobs in sectors like agriculture and fishing, crafts, services etc. The YS (2000) data based on a more detailed classification of occupations would also support the above comments regarding job aspirations of the youth (Table 10).

Table 9: Actually Employed by Major Occupational Group and the Unemployed by Desired Occupational Category, 2000 as %

Occupational Category	Actually Employed in Each Group	Unemployed Desiring an Occupation in the category
Managerial	1.2	...
Professional	5.1	8.8
Technical & related	4.8	4.3
Clerical	4.0	21.1
Sales & Services	13.2	6.5
Skilled agricultural & fisheries workers	24.8	...
Craft & related work	15.3	15.7
Plant & machinery operator	5.1	3.9
Elementary occupations	23.3	11.2
Other	3.2	28.4

Source: QLFS, 4th Quarter 1997

6. **Education and Youth Unemployment**

Unemployment in Sri Lanka over the last several decades has overwhelmingly been concentrated among those with 6 years and more of schooling (Table 11)[5]. The largest concentration, according to the Table, is seen among those with 6-10 years of schooling. These are the persons who have either stopped school education before taking the GCE (Ordinary Level) examination or having taken that examination, failed to obtain a pass in any of the subjects offered. The percentages of the unemployed with the two highest education attainment levels in Table 11 are also disturbingly high. The percentage for the highest educational level appears to have also increased in the course of the 1990s.

A special sub-category in this highest educational level, not separately shown in the Table, consists of those with a Bachelor's degree from a local university. Through a special analysis of QLFS data, the *Labour Market Information Bulletin* of the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (December 2000 issue, p. 27) estimates that in 1999, 2.0 per cent of total unemployment in the country consisted of these university graduates. Not only is unemployment heavily concentrated among the higher educational attainment levels, their rate (i.e. the rate to total labour force in respective educational groups) of unemployment also is substantially higher than among the less educated or the overall rate of unemployment (Table 12). Moreover the rate of unemployment goes up with every step in the educational ladder.

[5] The argument that youth unemployment in Sri Lanka is heavily concentrated among relatively more educated persons is widely accepted. Interpreting it to imply that unemployment is concentrated among holders of either the GCE (O-Levels) or the GCE (A-Levels), Dickens and Lang (1996) have designed their study with the objective, partly, of critically examining the factual basis for this argument. One of their conclusions is that "…Sri Lankan unemployment is best described as 'youth' unemployment rather than 'educated-youth' unemployment" (p. 623). The aspect of educated youth unemployment referred to in the text of this paper is that youth unemployment is overwhelmingly seen among *relatively* educated persons, defined as '6 years and more of schooling'. This argument can stand in spite of the conclusions of the above study.

Table 10: Structure of Job Aspirations among the Unemployed and the Youth outside Labour Force, 2000[a] Percentages

	Out of the Unemployed	Out of the youth outside labour force
Administrative/ Managerial	2.5	9.3
Professional (teaching excluded)	4.1	15.3
Technical / engineering	9.4	7.5
Clerical	12.4	7.9
Services	13.6	10.2
Sales workers	1.5	0.1
Education/ teaching	12.4	28.4
Any government job	2.0	2.1
Agricultural & fisheries workers	2.1	0.8
Production & related work	6.3	1.5
Transport equipment operator	5.8	0.7
Labourer	3.7	1.5
Business	5.7	3.6
Self-employment	11.1	4.0
Domestic services	0.7	0.4
Any job	5.6	3.1
Other	1.3	3.6

Note: [A] The respondents have been asked to give the first three of their preferences in respect of job aspirations. This Table analyses the data on what has been indicated as first preference 'aspiration'. Source: Youth Survey, 2000

Table 11: Distribution of the Numbers Unemployed by Level of Education: Selected Years in the 1990s as per cent of total unemployment

Level of Education	1990	1992	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998[a]
No schooling	1.3	1.5	1.2	0.8	1.2	0.6	0.1
Years 1-5 of schooling	7.2	7.7	7.4	4.7	6.7	4.8	5.3
Years 6-10 of schooling	49.7	50.5	44.9	47.1	42.3	45.3	46.3
GCE (O Level)	26.5	27.0	28.3	29.1	23.5	28.2	27.5
GCE (A Level) and above	15.4	13.7	18.2	18.4	18.9	21.0	20.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: [a] average for the first three quarters of the year. Source: Quarterly Report of the Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey (various)

An analysis of Youth Survey data, which cover youth unemployment only, supports this conclusion (see Table 13). A point of policy concern regarding time

trends (Table 11) is that the sum of the unemployed percentages in the two highest educational levels shown had gradually gone up in the 1990s, reaching 51% by 2000. It is noteworthy that this has happened during a time when the rate of overall unemployment was declining. The redeeming factor is that the rate of unemployment among persons with these highest educational attainment levels too has declined over the 1990s (Table 12) although their share in the total unemployment increased. In terms of the pattern of distribution of the unemployed by educational attainment, women appear to be more disadvantaged than men[6].

The social, political and economic implications of unemployment, so concentrated among the relatively educated youth, are quite serious. In addition to the frustration this causes among the unemployed youth and their families, the entire phenomenon is destabilising from the point of view of society at large. Recent history of Sri Lanka has been marked by extensively unsettled social and political conditions. There has been extensive political unrest in two separate theatres of conflict, (I) the north and the east, and (II) the rest of the country. Since the mid-1980s, most areas in the north and the east of the country have remained gripped in violence related to the on-going Tamil separatist movement. Generally unsettled socio-political conditions, which prevailed in the rest of the country during this period have intermittently turned into extensive violence. Going beyond the 1980s, the insurrection of 1971 was the first episode of the majority Sinhala community attempting to capture state power through violent revolutionary means. Even the

[6] The percentages of those with (I) GCE (O Level) and (II) GCE (A Level) respectively among the unemployed men and women during the 1990s were as follows:

For Men:	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	3Q: 1998
I	23.3	25.0	25.1	28.0	27.0	29.4	23.8	23.9	24.6
II	8.4	10.5	7.9	12.9	11.3	10.9	10.6	13.6	15.2
For Women	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	3Q: 1998
I	29.5	34.5	28.9	29.4	29.6	28.8	28.3	32.4	30.1
II	21.9	18.8	19.4	22.5	24.9	25.5	27.0	28.4	27.6

normal democratic political processes in the country over the last three decades, e.g. at times of Presidential, Parliamentary and Provincial/ Local Government elections, have been characterised by extensive violence.

Table 12: Rate of Unemployment at Different Educational Attainment Levels: Selected Years as percent of Labour Force (%)

Level of Education	1992	1995	1997	1998	2000:1Q
Overall Rate	14.6	12.3	10.4	9.7	8.0
No Schooling	3.5	1.9	1.3	0.3	1.3
Years 1- 5 of schooling	5.4	3.0	2.3	2.5	1.1
Years 6-11 of schooling	16.1	12.8	10.8	10.3	7.9
GCE (O. L.)	21.8	18.4	15.8	14.7	11.2
GCE (A. L.) & Above	21.2	20.0	19.0	17.4	15.4

Note: These rates were calculated by the author using the total numbers of the employed and the unemployed and their respective percentage distribution among different educational attainment categories, as shown in the source.
Source: Quarterly Report of the Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey (various)

All analysts of these conditions in modern Sri Lanka would agree that the country's youth, radicalised under the influence of varying ideologies, have always played a leading role in the developments leading to political violence. A widely presented argument is that, extensive conditions of unemployment and widespread sense of despair among the youth, led to erosion of their confidence in established socio-political and economic systems and processes. This, it is argued, created the desire among the radicalised youth to build up alternative systems. Depending on the ideological inclinations of different segments of the youth and their leadership, alternatives sought would have taken various forms. Those among the Sinhala youth, led by the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP) agitated and worked for revolutionary transformation of the state to one of socialism and the radicalised Tamil youth led by the separatist political parties and movements, for bifurcation of the Sri Lankan state. In addition, the major political parties in the mainstream also have used the youth joining their respective camps in the progressive militarisation of Sri Lanka's political processes.

These political conflicts have exacerbated the production losses to the economy emanating from extensive unemployment among the educated youth. Political unrest, leading to loss of investor confidence, has indeed been a major impediment to economic growth and development over the recent past. It is noteworthy that the youth have played and are playing, what could perhaps be called, the dominant role in these political conflicts. Quite naturally, it has been surmised that there has been a close causal relationship running from this highlighted pattern of unemployment to the political processes noted. We will return to this subject later on the basis of the Youth Survey data.

Table 13: Rate of Youth Unemployment by Level of Educational Attainment (%)

Educational Attainment	Rate of Youth Unemployment
No Schooling	33.33
Grade 1 – 5	32.56
Grade 6 – 11	55.68
Qualified to do A/ L	54.37
Passed A/ L	54.55
University Degree or Higher	59.46

Source: Youth Survey, 2000

7. Structural Mismatches

Related to some of the above characteristics of Sri Lanka's unemployment, there is yet another characteristic, which has attracted considerable analytical attention in the recent past. On the one hand, unemployment has been found to exist side by side with shortage of labour in different segments of economy. On the other hand, there has been a mismatch (i) between existing labour skills and the needs of the employers, as well as (ii) between aspirations of those waiting for jobs and employment opportunities that are available. Table 9 has set out the 2001 data on the distribution of actually employed persons by occupational groups and the distribution of the unemployed by occupations desired. This Table indicates one of

the above aspects of the mismatch in the labour market. One cannot be certain as to whether the job classification in Table 9 captures sufficiently well the desired job characteristics[7]. Yet the information already presented shows a huge mismatch between what is available and what is desired. The labour market mismatch in agriculture and fisheries sector occupations, clerical jobs and elementary occupations is particularly striking because the numbers involved in these categories is also quite large. The more educated a job aspirant is, he/she appears to desire less and less agricultural and manual jobs and to desire more and more of office jobs.

The economy is fairly extensively based on primary activities (agriculture and fisheries) with about 40 per cent of employment opportunities provided therein. Because of the low level of technological sophistication of these activities, many available jobs in agriculture and fishing are of the manual type. No doubt along with normal growth of an economy, the ratio of the employed in primary activities must be expected to decline. But at the present stage of growth of production and productivity, a high proportion of the available jobs in Sri Lanka is likely to be in this sector. Those who are looking for jobs, particularly the educated youth, must be aware of where they could find work for a living. Yet they are not interested in jobs in agriculture and fishing and the other 'elementary occupations'. Hence the very large excess of the actual employment percentage over the aspirations percentage in respect of these occupations. In contrast, as much as 21 per cent of the unemployed appear to be looking for clerical jobs, whereas only about 4 per cent of the currently available jobs are of this category[8]. These data are indicative

[7] A point worth making is that a proportion as high as 28.4 per cent of the unemployed are shown to be desirous of obtaining an unclassified group of occupations. A large residual category in any empirical classification indicates inadequacies in the classification system itself as well as in the underlying data set.

[8] Changes in office technology and also in management practices have produced a gradual decline in the share of 'clerical' jobs actually supported by the economy – in both public and private

of an existing mismatch in the labour market between what is aspired and what is available. Job preferences are towards white-collar type of jobs, which are not available in such large abundance.

Job aspirations are conditioned by the existing disparities among different occupation categories. These disparities are caused by factors like wage rate differentials and differences of social rating of different occupations. The educational system in the country, moreover, has been known to detract new entrants to the labour force from manual pursuits in agriculture, fishing, animal husbandry, services etc. There is an incompatibility between what the employers are looking for in the persons they would like to recruit and the characteristics - qualifications and training, experience and overall quality - of the manpower that is looking for jobs. Human values and skills and the institutional arrangements (e.g. in education) which influence them do not appear to change as rapidly as the economy and its structure. There is clearly a strong need for manpower planning and for mechanisms of effective information transmission about the structure of the available occupations to job aspirants as well as to training establishments.

Another dimension of this labour market mismatch concerns the aspirations-availability mismatch in respect of public and private sector jobs. The public sector in Sri Lanka, following the practices, which the British colonial system had left behind, operates on tenets of permanent or lifetime employment. Jobs in the public sector have come to be considered more secure and permanent than those in the private sector. There are also perceptions about public sector jobs being on average more paying than non-public-sector jobs. The formal system of education

sectors. In the absence of effective manpower planning practices and the asymmetries in information flows, large numbers of job aspirants and their parents/ guardians/ advisors, it appears, are failing to recognise the significant impact of these transformations on the job market. Hence the widespread nature of this unrealistic aspiration for ‘clerical’ jobs among the unemployed and also prospective entrants to labour market.

has tended to implant attitudes favouring the public sector. Over the last several decades, there has been a process of gradual shrinkage of the public sector and an expansion of the private sector in terms of employment opportunities. Attitudes of more educated job aspirants, however, have changed rather slowly. It appears that on the part of the educated youth, particularly of rural origin and those without adequate "accumulated social capital" to help them in life or ancestral resources to succeed in self-employment, there is still a greater desire to seek public sector jobs, in preference to private sector jobs. In formation is not available in the national statistical surveys referred to so far but a few comments can be made on the basis of the YS data. Of the total unemployed, recorded in the YS, 50 per cent have declared their preference to a public sector job. The proportion of the unemployed showing preference to private sector wage jobs (21 per cent) is even less than the proportion expressing preference to self-employment (27 per cent)[9].

In addition to the factors mentioned in the foregoing paragraph – factors that may be called 'objective' – there are also certain subjective factors affecting the job aspiration patterns among the youth. To a question whether they believe the private sector to be discriminatory in their recruitment and other employment related practices, as many as 54 per cent of the total sample have answered in the affirmative. The relevant proportion for the employed, unemployed and for those outside labour force is, 54, 52 and 55 per cent, respectively. This 'anti-private sector' attitude among as many as half of the country's youth is interesting as well as intriguing, in the light of recent developments. During nearly a quarter of a century in the recent past, there were strong trends of liberalisation, market orientation and globalisation. The idea of the private sector being the engine of growth and leader in economic activities has been actively propagated. Yet about

[9] The three percentages given add up to 98. The balance 2 per cent is to cover preference to an unspecified 'other' type of jobs.

half of the youth in the country have strong attitudes of suspicion about joining and serving the private sector[10]. This is further reason for the peculiar labour market behaviour of the youth – to wait until either they succeed in finding a desired type of occupation or they realise the futility of waiting any more and decide to take on what is available.

8. **Distribution in terms of Ethnic and Religious Groups**

YS (2000) data can be analysed to indicate distribution of youth unemployment by ethnic and religious groups in the country (Table 14). The three principal ethnic groups and the four principal religious groups are separately indicated. The interesting pattern emerging from this Table is the higher rate of youth unemployment among the majority ethnic, i.e. Sinhala and the majority religious, i.e. Buddhist communities. Superficially, one may be tempted to interpret these data as indicating the operation of open or hidden forces of discrimination against the majority ethno-religious community in the Sri Lankan economy and society. The normal minority tendency of in-group favouritism cannot be completely ruled out. The above type of arguments could be popular among some groups of analysts. It would, however, be difficult to sustain these arguments through objective evidence. Factors of the type discussed in the spatial distribution of youth unemployment may be in operation to produce also the pattern of distribution seen in Table 14. The aspiration-opportunity gaps operating in the labour market also might be operational in this regard too. It may be speculated that the employment expectations of the Tamil youth are of a lower level than those of the Sinhala youth. The former might be willing to take up low level jobs more readily than the latter because of basic survival needs. The distribution of

[10] The Youth Survey has made an attempt to find out why those who mistrust private sector do so. The two most widely cited reasons – cited so by all three groups of persons noted in the discussion in the text – are as follows: that private companies show favouritism to known groups and individuals and that they discriminate against persons from low income groups.

language competencies among the youth belonging to the three ethnic groups (see Table 17) is also a useful indicator of factors behind the issue under consideration. The basic problem anyway appears to be the inadequate expansion of total employment opportunities to be equitably distributed among all social groups in the society.

Table 14: Ethnic and Religious Distribution the Rate of Youth Unemployment (%)

Ethnicity	Rate of Unemployment	Religion	Rate of Unemployment
Sinhala	53.42	Buddhist	53.57
Tamil	40.50	Hindu	42.98
Moor & Malay	40.44	Muslim	40.88
Other	60.00	Christian	42.97
Total	50.35	Total	50.35

Source: Youth Survey, 2000

9. Family Bonds in Society and Youth Unemployment

Complex socio-cultural factors influence the high levels of unemployment found among relatively educated young persons in Sri Lanka. In addition to more commonly highlighted economic reasons, these socio-cultural factors affect the level and the rate of growth of production and productivity. As already noted, large numbers of young persons with many years of schooling, and some with even university level education, are voluntarily waiting long periods expecting to find certain types of 'desirable' occupations. In addition to specific job-related or career-related factors (e.g. the relative wage/ salary level, security of employment etc.), the perceptions about the desirability or otherwise of different occupations are governed by various social and cultural attitudes and beliefs. Whatever the reasons, large numbers of persons among the educated youth are so "waiting", while claiming to be unemployed, even though, in actual fact, they are under-employed.

This particular behavioural characteristic pertaining to a large part of the country's youth is facilitated by certain cultural traits in Sri Lankan society. Of these certain types of family traditions, which modernisation processes have so far failed to uproot or to significantly modify, may be noted as very significant. This pertains to the child-parent dependency pattern prevalent among all ethnic and religious groups in Sri Lankan society. Table 15 presents some interesting data in this respect. Of the entire sample of the YS between the ages of 15 and 29, 60 per cent fall into the labour force category. Half of the labour force is unemployed. Again of the total sample, 68 per cent are dependent on family, relatives and others. But the greatest degree of dependence is on family – 66 per cent. The point of relevance in the present discussion is that, of the total unemployed youth in this sample, 77 per cent are dependent on their family. The social tradition of 'family-dependence' discussed here implies two things. First, the youth at even rather mature ages (say 20-29) consider it their right to expect their families, basically parents, to look after them as long as they are unemployed and are unmarried. Second, the families, again the parents in particular, consider it their duty to positively respond to the above expectation of their children concerned.

The pattern of variation of age-wise ratio of family-dependency among the unemployed youth (i.e. the numbers in the last column of Table 15), excepting the ratio for the age 15 group[11], is interesting. One sees the family dependency ratio (last column, Table 15) declining with every step up along the age ladder. Yet even in the 28-29 group, as many as 64 per cent of the unemployed are dependent on their families. The youth in Sri Lanka appear to enjoy a peculiarly high sense of security provided by family during their unemployment, i.e. until they build up their own economic foundations for independent living. This is clearly a

[11] A fair proportion of the unemployed at 15 years of age is likely to come from families, which are not in a position to support them because of weak economic conditions. Hence the lower family dependency ratio for these persons than for those between 16 and 23 years of age. Anyway the absolute number unemployed in the 15-year-old group is rather small.

contributory factor making these youth so highly choosy or selective in the labour market. High rates of reported unemployment among the youth are therefore, at least partly, a reflection of this peculiar socio-cultural trait in Sri Lanka.

Table 15: Labour Force Participation, Unemployment and Dependency (%)

Age Group	Labour Force Participation	Number Unemployed	Number Dependent on Family/ Relatives/ Others	Dependent on Family	Unemployed Dependent on Family
15	10.5	6.0	92.5	91.0	75.0
16	21.5	11.3	88.7	85.3	90.0
17	32.9	22.5	86.5	83.4	82.2
18-19	49.2	28.2	77.3	75.6	82.1
20-21	72.4	39.8	65.4	64.0	78.5
22-23	85.3	42.5	55.9	54.4	78.0
24-25	85.5	36.3	46.6	45.8	70.5
26-27	91.8	34.8	38.0	37.5	64.1
28-29	94.2	32.4	30.2	28.1	64.4
Total	60.2	30.3	67.5	65.7	77.2

Source: Youth Survey, 2000

The additional burden, which this widespread tradition of family-dependence of the unemployed youth places on the not so well to do families is widely recognised in the society. It highlights the need for strengthening policies to bring job aspirations of the youth more in line with what the economy can offer. Strengthening of information flows among different actors and agents in the labour market and more focused manpower planning policies are called for. The transformation of educational systems to make vocational focus stronger is also needed. There is also the need to work out suitable schemes of unemployment insurance that can be financed without undesirable burdens on the government budget.

10. Role of Government/ Political Process in Perceptions of Unemployed Youth

It has been noted that the bulk of the unemployed youth sustain themselves during the period of job-search through family dependence. The bulk of them do not seem, however, to consider it their own responsibility or that of their families to secure employment. The majority of the youth in conditions of unemployment appear to place this responsibility squarely on politicians and official governmental agencies (Table 16). Identifying the lack of (i) income sources, (ii) employment opportunities or (iii) investment capital as principal problems faced by them[12], 58 per cent of the unemployed in the sample believe that politicians and governmental authorities are responsible for finding solutions to their problems.

The culture of blaming others for one's own difficulties are widely established among the youth as much as among many others in the Sri Lankan society (Table 16). Asked to indicate what they consider to be the most important to improve their life chances, only 5 per cent of both unemployed and employed have marked "effort/ self-confidence/ initiative" as the factor of number one importance. This survey finding is of policy significance in the context of the extensive current interest in the promotion of self-employment as a means of relieving the problem of unemployment. It will be referred to again in the concluding section of the paper. Dominant Sri Lankan cultural practices are closely shaped by religious philosophies, which uphold notions of *karmic* determinism, although no religious teaching advises people to always accept whatever is offered by *karma*. Democratic political traditions, as they developed in Sri Lanka since introduction of universal adult franchise, added to these social and cultural practices strong elements of a paternalistic/ populist political culture. Members of governments and

[12] Of the unemployed, 13.2 per cent think that incomes are the most important to improve their life chances, 31 per cent think that it is employment and 26.7 per cent think that it is capital. It may be noted that, strictly speaking, these are mutually related factors.

of political parties in power have come to be perceived by ordinary people as the ones who could help them find appropriate solutions to their problems. A widely heard argument is that policies of liberalisation and globalisation since the late 1970s have brought the private sector to the helm of the domestic economy making it the 'engine of growth'. In spite of the shrinkage of public sector, the majority of the youth in the country, as noted earlier, continue to be looking for public sector occupations[13]. Nepotism and political favouritism, as well as bribery, have become important factors in the selection of persons for various public sector occupations and in the distribution of various assets and benefits to people from the public sector.

Table 16: Youth Perceptions as to Who Should Help Problem-Solving (%)

Perception of Who Should Help	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Parents	4.2	3.4	3.9
Religious leaders/ institutions	5.7	4.1	5.2
Local elders	6.6	6.5	7.6
Politicians	43.9	48.8	44.2
Central/ Provincial Governmental Authorities	11.0	9.1	9.7
Community organisations/ NGOs	11.1	10.2	11.9
No one in particular	7.1	10.6	9.1

Source: Youth Survey, 2000

11. Youth Unemployment and Language Skills

Discussions of youth unemployment in recent times are replete with critical comments about skill and competence inadequacies of the youth in the labour force. An aspect of inadequacy so highlighted, particularly among those with relatively high levels of educational attainment is their lack of competence in an international language like English. The argument that, in a time of globalisation,

[13] Despite the rhetoric of making the public sector small, every government has tended, in the recent past, to intermittently create large volumes of public sector jobs for reasons of political

the suitability for certain types of jobs depends crucially on the competence in English is widely heard, particularly from the business community. In the post-1995 educational reforms too the importance of, and facilities for, English language teaching and learning are being highlighted. Youth Survey (2000) has collected information about language competencies of the respondents. The information so collected on competencies of respondents in non-mother tongue languages, analysed by ethnicity and employment status, is presented in Table 17. Data on competence of the persons of the Sinhala community in the Tamil language, and those of the Tamil and Malay/ Moor communities in Sinhala language are analysed here. The author believes that, in a multi-ethnic society like that of Sri Lanka, universal or near-universal competence in both locally spoken languages is of critical significance not only for national amity but also for better work place performance. Table 17 is suggestive toward certain conclusions, which are of relevance in the present discussion. Further research is needed, however, to gain hard evidence to be definitive on these matters.

First, in respect of each ethnic group, the degree of competence in each non-mother tongue language considered is slightly higher for the employed than the unemployed. The largest differences are found for the Malay/ Moor community. The employed among them appear to be more competent in both English and Sinhala languages than the unemployed. It is safe to presume that competence in all three languages is a very useful qualification to be gainfully employed in Sri Lanka. Second, competence in English is slightly better for the employed than for the unemployed, except for the speaking ability among the Tamil and for the reading ability among the Sinhala community. The difference, however, is nowhere as sharp as in the widely heard rhetoric of competence in English being a passport to good employment. Third, may be because of their position of being the

expediency. Jobs as teachers, "'*samurdhi*' animators", or irrigation "water managers" etc. were the main types of occupations so created in the public sector over the past decade.

majority community within Sri Lanka, the persons from the Sinhala community show the lowest interest in learning the other locally spoken language.

Table 17: Distribution of the Employed and the Unemployed by Ethnicity and Competence in Languages Other than Mother Tongue[a] (%)

Ethnicity & Employment Status	Sinhala Language		Tamil Language		English Language	
	Speech	Reading	Speech	Reading	Speech	Reading
Sinhala						
Employed	-	-	4.9	2.0	18.6	27.1
Unemployed	-	-	3.4	0.7	18.6	29.4
Tamil						
Employed	48.2	22.9	-	-	18.7	34.9
Unemployed	36.3	19.5	-	-	19.5	34.5
Malay & Moor						
Employed	67.9	49.4	-	-	35.8	43.2
Unemployed	61.8	38.2	-	-	25.5	47.3

Note: [a] The respondents were given the chance of selecting any one of four levels of competence: 1. Very good, 2. Good, 3. Poor and 4. Not at all. The Table covers only the responses at levels 1 and 2. Source: Youth Survey, 2000

12. Policy Insights for Future

The problem of youth unemployment, as well as solutions to that problem, has to be approached from within an inter-disciplinary analytical framework. Along with measures to increase wage jobs in the economy, interventions and reforms are required in a variety of subject areas for containment and solution of the problem. The analysis in the foregoing sections has, no doubt, been incomplete, and rather dispersed over too wide an area. But it highlights the need to be inter-disciplinary in trying to work out youth employment policies. In addition, the analysis undertaken so far also indicates that in the formulation and implementation of even narrow "economic" policies to create employment opportunities for the youth, certain socio-cultural and political factors have to be carefully considered.

Youth unemployment is a component of the more general unemployment problem – a component, which has been found, in Sri Lanka, to have normally behaved in the same direction as the aggregate (Dickens and Lang 1996). The general strategy of economic growth and employment creation, practised in the country over the recent past, has been of the so-called 'market friendly' type. This general policy environment would provide the backdrop for measures to address specific issues of youth unemployment. This overall policy framework, as implemented today, has two parts. First, it has a 'core' consisting of the prototype elements of 'market friendly' policies - (a) de-regulation, liberalisation and privatisation and (b) promotion of closer integration of the domestic economy with the process of globalisation. Second, there are certain peripherals to this policy core, in the form of poverty alleviation programmes and numerous initiatives to stimulate small enterprise development, self-employment and informal sector activities. This brief concluding section of the paper is not the place to attempt a detailed and comprehensive analysis of how effective these policies would be to address the kind of youth unemployment problem that has prevailed in Sri Lanka. It is sufficient here to highlight two points. First, the analysis in foregoing sections indicates certain peculiar features – most of them social, cultural and political – that characterise the youth unemployment scene in Sri Lanka. Second, even in the application of employment promotion strategies which are found quite commonly nowadays – e.g. promotion of self-employment and informal sector activities – it would be extremely useful to bear in mind these peculiarities of youth unemployment in the country.

Wage employment opportunities, created even at higher rates of growth, might not be able to meet the country's full employment needs. There exists therefore, substantial policy space in the area of self-employment. Past policy initiatives in the area of self-employment have often taken self-employment as a means of alleviating poverty. The youth, particularly the educated sections of the youth,

have not taken up self-employment activities under these programmes to any significant extent. The absence of involvement of young men in these programmes is particularly striking. YS (2000) data too, as already noted, confirm this lack of interest in self-employment among the unemployed youth. The challenge is to devise self-employment programmes, more importantly entrepreneurship development programmes, which will attract the country's educated youth. The support and intervention of the organised private sector in this area is of crucial significance.

In relation to employment, the significance of the 'quality' of the jobs created as much as the quantity has been highlighted. The record of the global integration strategy in Sri Lanka so far has not been so promising in this regard. This issue is being widely discussed in particular relation to conditions under which large numbers of women have secured employment. The quality issue is important also in the case of the large volume of self-employment opportunities and informal sector occupations generated. Among self-employment opportunities opened up too, women are important in quantitative terms. The issue of the quality of jobs appears to be a legitimate question in the minds particularly of the young and educated job seekers.

References

Central Bank (1999) *Report on Consumer Finances and Socio Economic Survey: Sri Lanka 1996/97* Part I, Colombo: Central Bank of Sri Lanka

Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) (1987) *Labour Force and Socio-economic Survey – 1985/86 Sri Lanka*, Preliminary Report, Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics.

Dickens, William T. and Kevin Lang (1996) "An Analysis of the Nature of

Unemployment in Sri Lanka", *The Journal of Development Studies* 31(4): 620-36

International Labour Organisation (ILO) (1971*), Matching Employment Opportunities and Expectations: A Programme of Action for Ceylon: Report and Technical Papers*, Geneva.

International Labour Office (2001*),* Towards an Employment Strategy Framework. Country Profile: Sri Lanka, (Draft) Mimeo.

Jayaweera, Swarna and Thana Sanmugam (2002) *Graduate Employment in Sri Lanka in the 1990s*, Colombo: Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR)

Lakshman, W. D. (1996) "Globalisation, Economic Growth and Employment in Sri Lanka", *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 39:3, pp. 673-704

O'Higgins, Niall (2001) *Youth Unemployment and Employment Policy: A Global Perspective,* Geneva: International Labour Organisation.

Richards, P.J. (1971) *Employment and Unemployment in Ceylon,* Paris: OECD.

World Bank (1999) *Sri Lanka: A Fresh Look at Unemployment*, Report No. 19609-CE, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Unit, South Asia Region.

YS (2000) Sri Lanka National Youth Survey, Centre for Anthropological and Sociological Studies, University of Colombo and South Asia Institute (University of Heidelberg), Colombo Office.

Youth and Education

Chandra Gunawardena

1. Introduction

This paper will analyse the data collected through questionnaires and interviews for the Youth Survey in order to examine

(i) The extent to which equal educational opportunity has been realised for young people with differing background characteristics, such as district and sector, ethnicity, social class and gender.

(ii) The relationship between the level of education and the development of selected essential competencies of the young respondents covered by the study.

(iii) The educational and career aspirations of the respondents and how these differ according to the level of education received by them.

(iv) The relationship between education and returns to education in terms of employment and remuneration, and

(v) The validity of the assumption that education brings about a radical attitudinal change in those who have benefited from education.

The analysis will provide insights regarding the realisation of expectations of both individual young persons and society from education through their perceptions as well as to identify the theoretical perspectives that explain the role of education in social and economic development of the country. It will also examine the reforms in education that are being implemented at present in the light of the above findings. The paper will also suggest strategies that can be proposed to reform the system of education to maximise the benefits that accrue to individuals as well as the society through education.

The analysis is constrained by certain limitations in data. Firstly, the Youth Survey covered a large age spectrum from 15 to 29 and therefore a considerable proportion of the respondents might still be continuing their education, either at secondary, collegiate or tertiary level. As such, conclusions arrived at regarding employability of the entire group may not be accurate. Moreover, data on the length of the period of awaiting employment, the total quantum of jobs available in the country, the total number of unfilled posts due to the non-availability of required skills and knowledge for employment in applicants are essential variables to be considered in investigating problems such as those posed in this survey.

2. Situational Analysis

Sri Lanka has given priority to education in its investment programme since regaining independence in 1948. Among the measures taken to widen access to education, were the introduction of free education from kindergarten to university level, the switchover from English to mother tongue as the medium of instruction, the establishment of a network of primary and secondary schools in the island, the establishment of Central Schools to provide senior secondary education in identified locations and the institution of a system of scholarships and bursaries. These investments have borne fruit in raising the level of literacy, participation in education at primary and secondary school level and in reducing gender, ethnic and class disparities in education to a great extent. Table 1 shows the rate of literacy in selected years.

Table 1: Rate of Literacy in Selected Years (Sri Lanka)

Year	Male	Female	Total
1946	76.5	46.2	62.8
1953	80.7	55.5	69.0
1963	85.6	67.1	76.8
1971	85.6	70.9	78.0
1981	91.1	83.2	87.2
1990/91	90.2	83.1	86.7
1996/97	94.3	89.4	91.8

Source: Dept. of Census and Statistics, (Sri Lanka). Consumer Finance and Socio-economic Survey, (1999) Central Bank

Table 2 indicates the participation rates of children in education at primary and secondary level by gender. The Ministry of Education has estimated the percentage of children who were admitted to school at Grade I to be 90.5%. In January 1998, Compulsory Education Regulations came into effect and presently efforts are being made to encourage parents to admit their children into schools and school principals have been requested to accept even children who cannot produce birth certificates in school. Yet, the lack of provision for education in the conflict-ridden North and East may lead to a reduction in enrolment and participation.

Table 2: Participation in Primary and Secondary Education by Gender - 1991

Grade	Male	Female	Total
5	71.4	69.8	70.2
9	96.3	94.2	95.3
O/L	92.6	92.8	92.7
A/L	65.3	69.9	67.6

Source: Ministry of Education (1992)

Whether equal outcome is obtained by all who participate in education is open to question. Thus, in Navaratne's study (1995) 400 pupils in 204 schools tested their attainment in literacy, numeracy and life-skills. The performance (all-island) was indicated as follows: Literacy (61.8%), Numeracy (45.1%) and Life Skills (26.7%). It was clear that none of the districts had reached mastery levels in all three areas.

University entrance has remained a 'bottleneck' limiting access to higher education. In 1998 (the latest year for which information is available) only 16.08 per cent of those who were eligible to enter universities were selected for admission. Yet graduate unemployment has loomed as a major problem facing the country during the last three decades. The public sector shrank from 21.5 per cent in 1990 to 13.6 percent in the first three quarters of 2000. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka noted that the increase in public sector employment by 3.2 per cent in 2000 was mainly in the armed forces, teaching and Samurdhi workers. Sporadic measures introduced without clear or committed understanding of the problem have fizzled out and temporary solutions provided employment that was neither gratifying nor remunerative to the graduates.

Nor has education succeeded in guaranteeing employment for those who receive education. Most recent data on unemployment available indicate a progressive increase in unemployment rates as the level of education rises (Table 3). This situation may be a result of non-availability of employment positions, the desire to obtain employment in a certain sector or occupation, or heightened career aspirations, singly or in combination.

Table 3: Level of Unemployment Rate by Education (% of Labour Force)

Period	No Schooling	Grade 0-4	Grade 5-9 NCGE	GCE O/L HNCE and above	GCE A/L
2000(a)	1.4	1.1	7.4	11.5	14.6
1st Quarter	1.3	1.1	7.9	11.2	15.4
2nd Quarter	1.8	1.1	6.8	11.4	13.1
3rd Quarter	1.2	1.0	7.6	12.0	15.2

(a) Average of first three quarters.
Source: Department of Census and Statistics

In 1971, the Dudley Seers report (ILO) on Matching Education to Employment argued that unemployment among the educated had partly resulted from their high aspirations on entering white-collar employment and a desire for academic education. Subsequent studies (World Bank, 1991) on employer expectations indicate that employers were critical of the quality of the products of Sri Lankan secondary schools and universities. The Marga Study (1991) on secondary education identified technical skills, the capacity for sustained effort over long periods even when the task is not interesting, the ability to be motivated by distant rewards and communication skills as important. Gunawardena's study (1991) showed that employers listed communication skills, personality, interpersonal skills and general transferable skills such as adaptability, decision-making ability and organisational skills as important requirements from university graduates, which they lacked.

The Asian Development Bank (2000) states that many A.L. qualified persons would prefer to 'queue' for 'inner circle' jobs rather than take something below the range they expect. It also identifies the A.L. holders' lack of skills, attitudes and work attitudes that employers find desirable. In the case of university graduates, specific mention is made of private business owners and managers who have difficulty in employing young graduates due to the latter's' low proficiency in English, inadequate practical experience and very often negative attitudes to

work. A recent survey (Chamber of Commerce, 1999) also identified more or less the same attributes as Gunawardena's 1991 survey. Additional attributes mentioned were the ability to head a team and achieve results in a short period, ability to prioritise/organise time productively, an open, positive, practical mind-set, willing to learn from a cross-section of people, general knowledge including world affairs, wide interests and dress sense, personal grooming and business etiquette.

Sri Lanka introduced wide-ranging reforms in education in 1972 but with the change in political power certain modifications have been done from time to time. The curricular reforms of 1981 were more limited in scope and implemented to even a lesser extent. All these reforms failed to have long-term impact on the system mostly due to shortcomings in implementation.

Taking cognisance of the criticisms being levelled the National Education Commission (NEC) put forward in 1992 a comprehensive set of Educational reforms from primary level to university level. The NEC formulated nine national Goals and six general goals in education. Among the objectives of the curricula reform, the following figure significantly:

1. Teaching should be oriented to the achievement of basic competencies,
2. Foster active learning including discovery, experimentation and practical work with the teacher acting as the adviser, organiser of resources, and facilitator as an alternative to passive learning of students by listening and taking down notes,
3. Move towards learning using varying resources including updated textbooks, activity rooms, resource centres, libraries, audio-visual aids, and other supplementary material rather than learn only from the sole experiences of the teacher,

4. Provide more inter-active learning activities, which involve group discussions, games and stimulation without depending only on interaction with the teacher,
5. Allow for school-based assessment where evidence via oral tests, practical tests, assignments, self-assessment is presented as a detailed student performance profile rather than through a pass/fail written examination only,
6. Follow the issue-based approach in presenting curriculum as opposed to knowledge for knowledge's sake attitude,
7. Attempt to identify and make use of real life experiences and strengths the pupils bring to school from home, which may not be related to the disciplines (NIE and MOE, 2000).

In conformity to the above objectives, the major goal of primary education reforms has been identified as the development of Essential Competencies in all children. The essential competencies are:

- Competencies in Communication,
- Competencies relating to the Environment,
- Competencies relating to Ethics and Religion,
- Competencies in Play and Use of Leisure and
- Competencies relating to Learning to Learn.

Understanding the need to develop children for life in a multi-cultural society, Oral English and Basic Sinhala or Tamil have also been added to the curriculum in the primary school. At secondary school level, there are worthwhile curricular changes:

- The introduction of Sinhala/Tamil as a second language,
- Technology being added to the subject of Science,

- Environment Studies and Life-competencies (at junior secondary level),
- And additional subjects of History, Geography, Development Studies, Sinhala/Tamil as a Second Language, Literature (Sinhala/Tamil/English), Modern or Classical Languages and Health and Physical Education,
- In addition School-based Assessment has been introduced in conformity with the changes implemented in the process of learning.

At collegiate level (Grades 12&13), Project Work is expected to have a significant impact on the development of competencies demanded by the world of work. It is also envisaged to introduce information technology as a compulsory subject at this level. Moreover, General English has been added to the curriculum and is at present a subject being examined at GCE (AL). In view of the lack of general awareness and an identified lack of essential skills as communication, problem solving and reasoning in students completing a secondary education, a Common General Test has also been held to for selection to university. At GCE (AL) science is being taught in English medium in selected schools.

The above General Education Reforms are being buttressed by Education Reforms at university level and in post-secondary and tertiary education. The former places stress on quality improvement, development of attributes desired by the employers in university graduates and the provision of a more relevant and practical education. The latter will focus on strengthening the post-secondary education and tertiary education sectors by expanding opportunities for relevant courses of study and by improving the quality of technical education.

The above reforms are being implemented island-wide in Grades 3, 7 and 11 in 2001. The feedback on the implementation of educational reforms from students and teachers (Little, 2000) and researchers who have conducted a few small-scale

studies is quite positive. They report a more stimulating classroom, greater motivation of students to attend school, a less likelihood of dropout and improvement of attainment in essential competencies. Yet they also indicate gaps, which persist in implementation for example, inequitable distribution of infrastructure provision, low level of teacher motivation and insufficient monitoring and supervision by the authorities.

The Youth Survey - Analysis of Data

1. Access to Education

The faith placed on education to bestow economic and social benefits on its recipients is well demonstrated by the interviewees from their own perspective as well as from that of their parents. These excerpts indicate that youth, irrespective of their socio-economic background or education still have such faith on education.

> *" Parents expect their children to complete their education up to a certain level and to become successful" (New Urban Middle Class respondent, O.L. Qualified, Young Voices, National Youth Survey 2000).*

> *"My parents could have asked me as the eldest son in the family to stop schooling and support the family. But they encouraged me to study. Despite the financial constraints, we were educated, fed and finally found jobs as well". (Squatter Settlement interviewee, O.L. Qualified, Young Voices, National Youth Survey 2000).*

> *"My poor parents think that at least the children will one day come into some kind of position in future with the help of education. I am the eldest child in the family. Therefore, my parents have hope and expectation laid on me." (Weligama, Passed year 8, Young Voices, National Youth Survey 2000).*

It is symptomatic that when asked "what is necessary to improve life-chances", the highest percentage of respondents had stated ‘knowledge/training/skills/guidance (all of which can fit under the broad term education) in their first response. This answer was ranked 1st in both the second and the third responses as well.

Looking at gender aspect the National Youth Survey also shows that women are better represented in the categories of those qualified to do A.L., passed A.L. and degree or higher qualifications than men (32.5% as against 27%, 17% as against 12% and 3.2% as against 2.4% respectively) showing to a certain extent, compatibility with national trends (Table 4).

Table 4: Level of Education by Sex

Sex	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-11	Qualified for A/L	Passed A/L	Degree or Higher	No Schooling
Male	4.8	52.2	27.1	12.7	2.4	0.8
Female	3.2	43.9	32.1	17.2	3.2	0.5

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

When examined in respect of ethnicity, Tamil respondents demonstrate higher achievement in terms of higher percentages in A.L. and university education while greater access to enter A.L. is recorded in the Sinhalese. The disparities that occur are noteworthy. (Table 5)

Table 5: Level of Education by Ethnicity

Ethnic Group	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-11	Qualified for A/L	Passed A/L	Degree or Higher	No Schooling
Sinhalese	2.2	51.5	31.0	12.9	1.9	0.5
Tamil	11.7	33.8	20.7	24.6	7.7	1.4
Moors	9.1	49.0	25.5	13.5	1.9	1.0

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

Respondents were requested to identify the social class to which they belong according to the area in which they were living. The three classes presented to them were upper class, middle class and working class. Table 6 is a vivid illustration of the close relationship between access to education and social class. The percentage of respondents in the working class progressively decreases as the level of education rises, from 73.7% in the no schooling group to 12.7% in the category of degree holders. These percentages are reversed for the middle class, while no such relationship emerges for the upper class.

Table 6: Level of Education by Social Class

Social Class	No Schooling	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-11	Qualified for A/L	Passed A/L	Degree or Higher
Working	73.7	48.3	40.3	20.4	19.1	12.7
Middle	15.8	43.2	52.1	72.9	75.9	79.7
Upper	--	3.4	2.0	2.6	2.4	3.8
Other	--	--	1.4	1.1	0.5	2.5
Don't Know	10.5	5.1	4.2	3.1	2.1	1.3

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

Similarly, in relation to district and sector also, differential access is indicated. Thus the Youth Survey data reveals that in some districts (for example, Ampara) access seems to be limited at secondary level while achievement levels in other districts such as Monaragala, Polonnaruwa and Puttalam are low (as indicated by the lower percentages of those qualified to do A.L., passing A.L. and getting a university education) (Table 7).

Table 7: Level of Education by District (Selected Districts)

District	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-11	Qualified for A/L	Passed A/L	Degree or Higher	No Schooling
Colombo	1.7	48.4	31.3	15.1	2.3	1.2
Matara	1.5	43.4	32.4	19.9	2.9	--
N.Eliya	5.5	61.5	28.6	2.2	2.2	--
Jaffna	1.3	11.3	31.3	44.4	11.9	--
Ampara	35.0	18.3	28.3	11.7	6.7	--
Monaragala	1.6	62.3	21.3	13.1	--	1.6
Polonnaruwa	3.3	65.6	13.1	14.8	1.6	1.6
Puttalam	5.8	54.8	21.2	13.5	1.0	3.8

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

It is also relevant to note, that in spite of the recent initiatives to uplift education in the estate sector, the representation of youth from this sector is very low in collegiate and higher education (Table 8).

Table 8: Level of Education by Sector

Sector	Grade 1-5	Grades 6-11	Qualified for A/L	Passed A/L	Degree or Higher	No Schooling
Urban	4.5	43.4	34.1	14.5	3.0	0.5
Rural	3.5	48.4	28.9	15.8	2.8	0.6
Estate	10.7	68.0	16.6	1.8	0.6	2.4
Total	4.1	48.6	29.2	14.7	2.7	0.7

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

On the whole, the analysis indicates that mere expansion of schooling does not guarantee equal outcomes. The failure of disadvantaged groups to obtain education appears to be linked to economic problems. Among the 76.3% who mentioned about problems related to education, almost one third (33.6%) cited economic problems. This was confirmed by the interviews.

> *"Biggest problem I have is collecting money to attend tuition classes. On certain days when I attend classes, I do not have money for lunch" (Squatter Settlements, Studying for A.L., Young Voices, National Youth Survey 2000)*.

Yet another young woman stated that she could not continue her studies and that her brother and sister also stopped schooling when they were in grade 7 and 8.

> *"Three of us could not study well due to our poverty and my mother's departure to the Middle East." (Free Trade Zone, O.L. Qualified, Young Voices, National Youth Survey 2000).*

Others pointed out systemic deficiencies such as lack of learning/training opportunities (12.0%) or problems with teachers (11.9%). Lack of opportunities for learning/training appeared to be related to factors such as residence. In fact when questioned about "personal access to educational facilities" such as schools, only 30.4% said it was good while another 26.2% considered it to be bad. It is perhaps noteworthy that even among those who had a university or higher qualification, only 34.6% considered access to educational facilities to be good (Table 9). Once again, this reiterates the view that people with different background characteristics have a differential access to schooling.

Table 9: Level of Education by Access to Educational Facilities

Level of Satisfaction	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-11	Qualified for A/L	Passed A/L	University or Higher	No Schooling
Good	17.2	26.2	35.2	38.7	34.6	11.1
Satisfactory	29.3	40.4	48.3	47.3	52.6	5.6
Bad	53.4	33.4	16.5	14.1	12.8	83.3

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

Some of the youths interviewed seemed aware of the shortcomings in the system of education, especially those on which the private sector focuses as well as the fact that private sector plays a more critical role in employment at present.

> *"Management of the companies should be able to go to the universities and make the students aware of the company employment requirements. The mentality of the graduate should also be made suitable to work for the private sector. The company management has to be made involved in educational policy making and restructuring the syllabuses." (Urban Middle Class, A.L. Science, Young Voices, National Youth Survey 2000).*

Analysis of data from the National Youth Survey indicates that even at the level of access, equal educational opportunity does not appear to have been realised yet, in spite of the extensive range of incentives offered to children and youth to continue in and obtain an education.

2. Education and Essential Competencies

One of the expected outcomes of education is the development of essential competencies. For example, it is assumed that the completion of primary education should enable a person to master basic competencies like literacy and numeracy. While the Youth Survey had not specifically focused attention on identified essential competencies, language skills form a major competency, which are useful for those living in a multilingual society. Of the youth surveyed, only 87.9% could speak 'very good' or 'good' Sinhala and 24.7% 'very good' or 'good' Tamil. The ability to speak more than one language was limited to 12.4% only (with 6.7% speaking Sinhala and Tamil, 5.2% Sinhala and English and 0.5% Tamil and English).

Even though English competency is being pointed as the major barrier to employment, especially in the private sector, only 11.4 per cent of the degree holders claim to possess good competency in English. This clearly signifies the need to make the young people aware of the importance of English.

Some of the interviewees had identified lack of English knowledge as one of the barriers they face in obtaining employment and in climbing the ladder at the workplace. In the whole sample, in spite of this realisation of the value of English, only 7.6 per cent had stated that the ability to write English was very good with only 32.3 % considering it to be good.

3. Education and Aspirations

Education is often perceived as an instrument of obtaining employment and therefore, there appears to be a close link between education and career aspirations. On the one hand, it is possible that youths may lower their aspirations in the face of the reality of a constricted labour market. At the same time, difficulty of obtaining employment may give rise to aspirations for further education.

It is relevant to note that 70% of the respondents had stated that they wanted to get a further education. This can be motivated, on the one hand, by an interest in knowledge for its own sake or a realisation of the advantages that further education can bestow on youth. Thus one respondent who has not yet completed her O.L. stated that in order to find a job she is collecting more qualifications.

The respondents were questioned as to what type of further education they would like to pursue. The responses clearly indicate that the highest percentage (36.8%), despite visible graduate unemployment, still wish to gain a university/higher

education. At each level of education (except those with no schooling) the percentages are considerable ranging from 27.8% of the group with grade 6-11 education to 66.7% of the group who already possess university degrees. This evidence justifies Ronald Dore's selection of Sri Lanka as a country, which had the Diploma Disease.

A relationship between the level of education and the type of further education desired emerges as, for example, 77.8% of those with no schooling and 37.5% of those with Grade 1-5 education, aspire for a vocational education and more than 40% of those with an education beyond O.L. desire a university/higher education (Table 10).

Table 10: Level of Education by Type of Further Education Desired

Type of Further Education	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-11	Qualified for A/L	Passed A/L	Degree or Higher	No Schooling
Technical	9.4	11.1	7.1	6.1	7.1	--
Vocational	37.5	26.9	13.3	23.0	16.7	77.8
University /Higher	34.4	27.8	46.1	40.6	66.7	--
Aesthetic	--	3.4	2.9	2.9	2.4	--
Computing	6.3	5.5	9.1	15.6	--	--
Other Special	9.4	6.3	4.8	4.5	4.8	11.1
Other	3.1	2.0	1.5	2.5	2.4	11.1
A.L./O.L.	--	17.1	15.1	4.9	--	--

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

The National Youth Survey inquired from the respondents the type of employment they desire. The responses indicated that the highest percentage had shown a preference for teaching/education (Table 11). This is probably because teaching is perceived as a job that requires no specialised skills or knowledge and also as an available type of employment for which large numbers are recruited. The fact that another 15.4% opted for self-employment/business points out that at least a proportion of youth have realised that the jobs in the public sector are scarce.

Table 11: Type of Employment Wanted

Type of Employment	%	Rank	Highest %	Level of Education
Teaching/Education	17.4	1	38.9	Qualified for A.L.
Self-employment/Business	15.4	2		
Service workers	10.4	3		
Clerical	8.6	4	36.5	Qualified for A.L.
Professional (other than teaching)	8.2	5	38.9	Qualified for A.L
Technical/Engineering	7.5	6	49.8	Grades 6-11
Administrative/managerial	5.2	7	44.1	Qualified for A.L.
Unidentified	5.1	8		
Any type	4.1	9		
Production related	4.1	9	81.5	Grades 6-11
Transport Operators equipment	3.7	1	78.3	Grades 6-11
Elementary occupations	2.6	12		
Sales workers	0.8	14	54.5	Grades 6-11
Domestic duties	0.6	15		

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

Table 11 also indicates that the type of employment desired is to a certain extent commensurate with the level of education. The highest percentages of youth desiring jobs in the professional, and administrative/managerial fields were qualified to do A.L. (38% and 44% respectively). In such fields as technical/engineering, sales workers, agricultural and fishery workers, production workers and transport equipment operators, the majority come from groups, which had an education up to grades 6-11 (49.8%, 54.5%, 62.7%, 81.5% and 78.3% respectively).

Taken together these figures disprove to a certain extent the hypothesis that educated unemployment exists because those with more schooling 'queue' up for white-collar or more prestigious jobs. On the other hand, demand and supply forces seem to be the determining factors of employment. As is to be expected, even though almost half the respondents stated they prefer to work in agriculture, this group came mainly from groups with less education (57.9% of those who had no schooling and 68.6% of those with a grade 1-5 education). That the level of

education influences the preference for employment is clearly indicated by the following statements:

> *"A good job is when there is a good pay and freedom. I like to be a clerk because you don't have to work so hard and there is a pension" (Free Trade Zone, Educated up to O.L., Young Voices, National Youth Survey 2000).*

> *"A good job is where a person can come home at the end of the day hoping to continue cultivating. Government jobs are services for society but state sector jobs are only for big shots. Cattle farming, carving, vegetable growing as self-employment are good here". (Tanamalvila, educated up to Year 8, Young Voices, National Youth Survey 2000).*

> *"The state sector jobs are good. There is stability for the employees. Salary is less. But it is better than the private sector which throws out the employees in 6 months without paying the due taxes". (Weligama, Educated up to O.L., Young Voices, National Youth Survey 2000).*

Preference for employment in the public sector by secondary school and university graduates has been recorded in the literature. During the last two decades, however, public sector employment has drastically declined. The youth in the sample were questioned about the employment sector that was preferred by them. It is noteworthy that 53.4 % still indicated a preference for the public sector. At all levels of education, except 'no schooling' almost 50 % or more (in the case of those with a higher education, the percentage rose to 72.2%) indicated such a preference. Only in the 'no schooling' group did 42% say that they preferred self-employment (Table 12). This reveals that perceived benefits such as job security seem to attract youth even at present to the Government sector, without their being aware of the dearth of opportunities in that sector.

Table 12: Preferred Employment Sector by Level of Education

Sector	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-11	Qualified for A/L	Passed A/L	Degree or Higher	No Schooling
Government	47.5	48.3	57.2	62.3	72.2	21.1
Private	12.7	18.2	22.4	22.7	21.5	26.3
Self-Employment	39.8	31.8	19.1	11.6	5.1	42.1
Other	--	1.2	1.3	3.3	1.3	5.3
Don't Know	--	0.5	--	--	--	12.5

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

At the same time 53% of the total sample felt that private sector discrimination exists in recruitment due to reasons such as favouritism to known groups and individuals (23%), discrimination of low income groups (9.3%) being the major forms of discrimination cited.

4. Education and Employment

When the type of activities in which the youth in the sample were engaged was examined, it was seen that 39% were still engaged in educational activities (Table 13). Another 30.3% stated that they were unemployed or seeking employment. In fact, 79.7% of the total sample felt unemployment was the major problem facing the country. Considerable proportions of youths from all levels of education were included in this unemployed group. It is surprising that the highest percentage of those possessing a higher education (51.9%) were still 'studying' indicating perhaps the non-availability of jobs for graduates and therefore the need to improve qualifications further. At the same time, the highest percentage of those permanently as well as casually employed had a Grade 6-11 education (44.1% and 56.3% respectively).

Table 13: Type of Activity by Level of Education

Type of Activity	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-11	Qualified for A/L	Passed A/L	Degree or Higher	No Schooling
Permanently Employed	20.3	10.0	8.9	15.4	11.4	15.8
Casually Employed	28.8	17.4	10.3	13.0	7.6	36.8
Unemployed/ Seeking employment	23.7	34.4	22.9	34.0	27.8	26.3
Schooling/Studying	19.5	32.0	54.9	35.5	57.9	--
Unable to work	1.7	0.1	--	--	--	10.5
Domestic Work	5.1	5.6	2.5	1.9	1.3	5.3
Other	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.2	--	5.3

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

When the respondents were questioned about their satisfaction with present financial position, only 25% expressed satisfaction. Around 40% of those with a moderate to higher education stated that they were 'somewhat satisfied'. The fact that the highest percentage indicating dissatisfaction with their financial position, were those with a Grade 1-5 education, (50%) and with no schooling (55%), points to a wage structure that is largely tied up with educational qualifications (Table 14).

Table 14: Level of Satisfaction with Present Financial Position and Level of Education

Level of Satisfaction	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-11	Qualified for A.L.	Passing A.L.	Degree or higher	No schooling
Satisfied	16.1	25.0	26.7	26.7	26.6	11.1
Somewhat Satisfied	33.1	44.2	47.7	49.4	44.3	27.8
Not satisfied	50.8	30.8	25.3	23.9	29.1	55.6
Don't know	--	0.1	0.2	--	--	5.6

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

The mismatch between education and supply was enunciated by an O.L. qualified respondent thus 'Qualified persons are cornered at home, while unqualified persons are doing jobs' (Free Trade Zone).

What is encouraging to note is the hopeful expectations of youth with regard to future financial position. Almost 68% hoped their financial position would improve in the future. The percentage that expressed such hope increased as the level of education improved (from 44.4% with no schooling to 74.4% for those with a degree or higher qualifications) (Table 15).

Table 15: Expectations Regarding Future Financial Position by Level of Education

Expectation	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-11	Qualified for A.L.	Passing A.L.	Degree or higher	No schooling
Stayed same	16.9	17.8	20.2	19.0	17.9	22.2
Better	55.1	69.3	67.1	68.5	74.4	44.4
Worse	23.7	9.2	9.3	9.0	3.8	22.2
Don't Know	4.	3.7	3.4	3.6	3.8	11.1

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

5. Education and Transformation of Attitudes

The final section of this paper will look at the values and attitudes of young people surveyed to find out whether there is any discernible impact of education on the transformation of attitudes.

Some of the questions focused on their attitudes towards personal decisions such as marriage, which are shaped by traditional values, and others towards current issues considered as important.

It is pertinent to note that in a country where arranged marriages had been the norm, a change was being effected (Table 16). The majority (53%) said they preferred a love marriage with the percentage progressively increasing with the level of education. Yet none of the respondents with a higher education or no schooling said they would like to live unmarried together with their partner.

Table 16: Preference for Marriage by Level of Education

Preference	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-11	Qualified for A/L	Passing A/L	Degree or Higher	No Schooling
Arranged Marriage	50.8	45.1	34.4	32.9	32.9	52.6
Love Marriage	39.8	46.9	59.1	59.3	62.0	36.8
Living Together	0.8	0.3	0.5	0.2	--	--
Don't Know	8.5	5.7	5.9	7.6	5.1	10.5

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

It was the same for the other two questions, (marrying a person from another religion or ethnic group) which indicate that those who are highly educated appear to have more rigid attitudes towards selecting their partner.

The position that women have the same rights was accepted by the majority (58.3%) and no appreciable difference existed in the responses of respondents from different levels of education. A respondent who is studying for her A.L. in an International School was quite emphatic regarding this matter.

> *"Men should be very understanding; they should not put down women and think that women are only for the kitchen. There should be respect for women. Women should have their own rights" (Urban Middle class, Young Voices, National Youth Survey, 2000).*

It is interesting to note that while the respondents had identified various institutions as having the ability to resolve tension in the country, from among those with a higher education the largest proportion (26.9%) remained noncommittal. They could not identify any one.

The youth were requested to identify themselves according to four categories: (i) according to race and religion, (ii) Sri Lankan (iii) both of the above and (iv) other. The responses show a strengthening of the Sri Lankan identity, but considerable proportions still continue to consider their affiliation to race and religion as important (Table 17). Yet the highest proportions considering themselves as Sri Lankan come not from the highest educated group but from among those qualified to do A.L. and passing A.L.

Table 17: Self-identification by Level of Education

Identification	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-11	Qualified to do A/L	Passing A/L	Degree or Higher	No schooling
According to race/religion	23.7	24.8	17.9	22.5	11.4	38.9
Sri Lankan	30.5	40.4	44.6	45.5	26.6	11.1
Both of the above	25.4	10.7	19.5	22.3	48.1	22.2
Other	20.3	24.1	18.0	9.7	13.9	27.8

Source: National Youth Survey data, 2000.

6. Conclusions

A substantial part of the time of young people (aged between 15-29) is taken up by educational activities, especially in countries like Sri Lanka where the participation in formal education is relatively high. Education is viewed as a passport to a better life, especially to economic advancement and social mobility.

The Youth Survey sheds light on some of the issues connected with education, aspirations, employment and political socialisation of young people in Sri Lanka.

Analysis of data from the Youth Survey indicates, to a large extent, that equal educational opportunity has been realised with little or no disparity in the level of education of males and females, of different ethnic and religious groups. Social class and geographical residence are the variables having a direct relationship with education. Similarly, in the case of essential competencies, the survey data reveal that within the narrow definition utilised here, not much headway has been made in the development of essential competencies

These findings are in conformity with the research findings in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, that in spite of the commitment of governments to ensure equal educational opportunity, the inequitable allocation of resources in the school system and shortcomings in curricula and teacher attitudes tend to affect the disadvantaged groups more than the others. In these studies educational achievement has been correlated with SES (Socio-economic status) as a proxy for students' initial status, to estimate the influence of background variables on education of students. From Coleman Report (Coleman and Moynihan, 1966) in 1960s studies have demonstrated that school differences exert little effect on students' outcome measures. Identification of methodological errors in these studies have prompted researchers (e.g. Burstein, 1980) to consider the individual child as the primary unit of analysis and then to incorporate additional levels (classroom, school and district) into the analytical model. Use of multi-level models has produced more precise estimates of school and home effects on achievement.

Literature also distinguishes between private and social benefits of education. Benefits to individual students (private benefits) are easy to conceptualise: the

student who learns to read and write in school is better off than he or she who are unable to read or write. It is assumed that a student who has received a higher education will have a greater likelihood of finding a job and getting a higher remuneration than one with less educational qualifications in normal circumstances and also more job satisfaction due to the nature of his work. Social benefits, on the other hand, accrue to people other than those who are being educated. The improvement of health care services as a result of a doctor obtaining a medical education and performing her/his job effectively is an example. Society becomes better off because of the education of that individual as the individual would not have appropriated all of the benefits of the education received for only his- or her- self. Others derive (social) benefits above and beyond those (private) benefits received by the individual.

In considering the non-economic benefits of education schools have been identified as important and effective modernising institutions. People who attain higher levels of education are also expected to have higher levels of educational and occupational aspirations, less adherence to traditional customs and beliefs, an openness to new experiences, a willingness to migrate, a reduction of family ties and more positive and balanced outlook in life.

In this analysis, the relationship between education and aspirations did not emerge as straightforward. Thus when, on the one hand, youth expressed a desire for collecting educational credentials to realise ambitions of getting a 'good' job, their employment aspirations were closely related to their education. However, the thesis of the "Diploma Disease" and Dudley Seers' conclusion that the majority remains unemployed due to a mismatch of aspirations and education could not be confirmed due to an insufficiency of data related to other variables such as availability of employment.

Education is viewed as an investment in human capital, whereby expenditures of money and time are made to acquire education, which increases individual productivity, value in the labour market and income (Schultz, 1963). Especially in higher education, individuals who have achieved different years of schooling, as well as attended different institutions are expected to receive more benefits. Of special interest here are the issues of education-work fit, job-related benefits of higher education and over-education and mismatch

The value of education in terms of earnings has been tested empirically (Solmon, 1981; Becker, 1983; Rumberger, 1987; and Murphy and Welch, 1989) and the studies have indicated that everything else been equal, those with more and better education seem to earn more.

The critical importance of employment in the lives of the youth was brought out by the National Youth Survey. Almost 1/3 of the sample was either unemployed or seeking employment. Increasing education appeared to make it more difficult to get employment. A similar percentage expressed dissatisfaction with the present financial position. Here too, the largest percentage of those who were satisfied with their financial position had a middle-level education. Higher education, especially does not seem to have guaranteed employment or after employment, satisfaction with monetary rewards. The Youth Survey data thus did not confirm the findings of above researchers regarding the relationship between education and earnings.

Jencks et al, (1972) however, argued that "Economic success seems to depend on varieties of luck and on the job competence that are only moderately related to family background, schooling or scores on standardised tests…. Competence seems in most cases to depend more on personality than on technical skills". It has also been pointed out that discrimination (for example, of minorities, low income

groups, women) plays a role in preventing productivity from being reflected in higher earnings. It was the apparent failure of liberal educational reform to bring about structural changes in society to produce more equitable distribution of wealth and power that prompted radical educational theorists to put forward the Reproduction Theory. Schools reflect the class structure of society, either directly in their own structures or more subtly and indirectly through the ideologies on which they were based and which they instilled in students.

In an elaboration of the same, Bowles and Gintis (1976) in their "Correspondence Theory" argued that there was a correspondence between the structures of relations in schools and the structure of relations in the capitalist economy. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) also saw schools as largely influenced by powerful economic and political forces and reproducing the cultural relations of society.

Others pointed out that the correlation between education and earnings might disappear when over-education takes place in relation to the demands from the economy (Berg, 1971; Dore, 1976). Yet subsequent studies (Solmon, 1981; Murphy and Welch, 1989) reported in periods of economic growth, the demand for university-educated workers and consequently their earnings would increase.

The above findings to a great extent are compatible with the some of the theoretical perspectives discussed at the outset of this paper. Largely, the National Youth Survey Data point to a situation explained by the "correspondence theory", rather than the "human capital development theory", where the hierarchical social structure is reproduced through the school system with benefits from education, accruing mainly to the more privileged. The extent to which "resistance" exists in education cannot be ascertained due to the type data collected by the Survey. As far as the education-employment nexus is concerned, what has been confirmed is

the tenuous relationship between supply and demand for the educated in the labour market rather than "a mismatch of aspirations."

With regards to transformation of attitudes, Youth Survey indicates that some traditional stereotypes, for example, attitudes towards caste, horoscopes, and marriage are gradually breaking down, but an improvement in one's belief in their own self-efficacy was not evident. On the whole though, positive attitudes were indicated by survey data. The relationship between education and attitudinal transformation cannot be inferred from this kind of survey data.

The educational reforms, which are being implemented at present, appear to have been formulated with a clear understanding of the ills that besiege the education of our country. They attempt to resolve most of the shortcomings that have been identified by previous Sri Lankan research on education, especially with regards to its relationship with employment. Similarly, the reforms on post-secondary and tertiary including university education will also undoubtedly contribute to the production of better-trained and better-skilled men and women to be absorbed into the labour market.

These initiatives in education are well supported by inputs from international donor agencies such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. What is overlooked very often and even in previous occasions, when similar ambitious educational reforms were introduced is that a better-skilled supply cannot compensate for the negative consequences of a sluggish or stagnant demand from the labour market. To some extent, innovativeness and creativity fostered through educational reforms might create more employment opportunities, yet it needs to be stressed that in addition to provision of training opportunities and change of attitudes, provision of capital and other infrastructure facilities such as marketing are needed to re-orient youth from academic to vocational education and self-

employment. Thus if the country is to reap the dividends expected from the inputs made in the reform of the educational sector, the authorities need to focus serious attention on economic reform, which should go hand in hand with educational reform.

References

Asian Development Bank (2000): *Advancing Knowledge and Skills for Development and Competitiveness: The Tertiary Education Strategy*, Development Forum, Paris.

Becker, G.S. (1983): *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

Berg, I. (1971): *Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery.* Beacon, Boston, Massachusetts

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. (1977): *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture***.** Sage, London.

Bowen, H.R. (1977): *Investment in Learning: The Individual and Social Value of American Higher Education*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, California.

Bowles, S. and Gintis, H. (1976): *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

Burstein, L. (1980): The analysis of multilevel data in educational research and evaluation. In Berliner, D.C. (Ed.) (1980) *Review of Research in Education***,** American Educational research Association, Washington, DC.

Chamber of Commerce (1999): Employment Survey, Colombo.

Coleman, J.S., Moynihan, D. P. (Eds.) (1966): *On Equality of Educational Opportunity***.** National Centre for Educational Statistics, Washington, DC.

Dore, R. (1976): *The Diploma Disease: Education, Qualification and Development.* University of California Press: Berkely, California.

Gunawardana, Chandra, Gunawardana, Raja Kularatna, W.G. & Seneviratna,

H. M. (1991): *Study on Education-Employment Linkage: A Survey of Employees of Tertiary level Graduates*. World Bank and Marga. (Unpublished).

Harber, C.R. (1984): Development and political attitudes: The role of schooling in Northern Nigeria. *Comparative Education***.** 20 (3) 387-403.

Jencks, C. S. et al (1972): *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America.* Basic Books: New York**.**

Little, Angela W. (Ed. 2000): *Primary Education Reforms in Sri Lanka*, Ministry of Education and Higher education, Battaramulla.

McRobbie, A. (1991): *Feminism and Youth Culture: From "Jackie" to "just Seventeen"***.** Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Murphy, K. and Welch, F. (1989): Wage premiums for college graduates: Recent growth and possible explanations. *Educational Researcher* 18(4) 17-26

National Education Commission (Sri Lanka) (1992): *Towards a National Education Policy.* NIE Press, Maharagama.

National Education Commission (Sri Lanka) (1997): *Reforms in General Education.* NIE Press, Maharagama

National Institute of Education and Ministry of Education (Sri Lanka) (2000): *Curriculum Process Plan, Sri Lanka.* NIE Press, Maharagama.

Navaratna, A. (1995): *What the Children have Learnt after Five Years of Schooling,* National Institute of Education, Maharagama.

Pascarella, E. T. and Terenzine, P. T. (1991): *How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research.* Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, California.

Renshorn, S.A.(ed.) (1977): *Handbook of Political Socialisation***.** Free Press: New York.

Rumberger, R.W. (1987): The impact of surplus schooling on productivity and earnings. *Journal of Human Resources.* 22 (1); 24-50.

Schultz, T.W. (1963): *The Economic Value of Education.* Columbia University

Press: New York.

Solmon, L.C. (1981): New findings on the links between college education and work. *Higher Education* 10(6) 615-48.

Solomon, L. C. and Fagnano, C. L. (1998): Benefits of Education In: Husen, T. and Postlethwaite, N. (Eds.) (1998) *Education: The Complete Encyclopaedia Elsevier* Science Ltd.

Willis, P. (1981): *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs.* Saxon House, Fernsborough.

Youth and Politics: Why They Rebel?

Laksiri Fernando

1. Background

The age group between 15 and 29 years, the target group of the National Youth Survey, constitutes around 30% of the total population with an immense significance in politics of the country. From a global perspective, it is said, "the young generation is traditionally seen as one of the most dynamic mediums of social change. This is because the young often play an important and even dominant role in social movements which are usually the driving force behind these changes" (Glinski 1998)

The local context in respect of youth in politics, however, appears to be much more problematic and complex. It was a historical fact that over 80% of the participants in the youth rebellion in 1971 came from the age group between 15 and 29 years (Obesekera 1974). The purpose of this rebellion, however, was not merely to effect social change in its broadest definition, but to overthrow a democratically elected government and to install what was termed as a revolutionary one. The rebellion was conspiratorial, violent and insurrectionary - going against all the so far cherished democratic norms in the country. The insurrection that lasted for several weeks during April and May 1971 mainly in the countryside accounted for at least over five thousand lives.

It was with the support of the youth of this age group that the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP – Peoples' Liberation Front) again led its second insurrection or armed struggle during 1987-89. The second insurrection, however, was different to the first one in several respects. The second one, more than being an insurrection,

was a prolonged armed struggle spanning over two years. The motivation of the youth for this insurrection was drawn from patriotic feelings against the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) stationed in the country rather than the socio-economic grievances in the rural districts. The magnitude of the disaster unleashed as a result of the second insurgency as well as the counter-insurgency was unprecedented. The total killings during the period are reported to be over fifty thousand, being mainly the youth of rural origins. The most astonishing was the violent and brutal nature of the killings and actions by both the insurgency and counter-insurgency forces.

The radical political nature of the youth can possibly be traced to the early years of the 20th century and to the formation of the Young Lanka League and the Jaffna Youth League (de Silva 1981). Youth unrest has been a recurrent theme in Sri Lankan politics since then and the main support base of the old left movement that emerged in the 1930s also came from the youth sections of the society. However, until the JVP politics and ideology, a combination of Maoism and nationalism, came to influence the thinking of the youth in the 1970s, the youth movements by and large were peaceful, non-violent and democratic.

As the results of the survey under review reveal, the overwhelming nature of the views and attitudes expressed by the youth presently are anti-systemic in nature and presumably an underlying factor both in the insurrectionary and/or terrorist movement led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the North as well as the radical leftwing and nationalist politics of the JVP at present in the South.

2. Why Young Rebel?

Why young rebel? There is no easy answer to the question. There seems to be a general rebellious nature in youth everywhere depending on the psychological circumstances of growing up, but perhaps not to the extent of what is revealed in Sri Lanka. Erik Erickson argued that the transformation from childhood to adulthood entails a process of self-questioning, emotional instability and even social despair, which he called "identity crisis" (Erickson 1968). It is usually a process at the end of which a person gets adjusted to the established society and to the conventional way of life. The shorter this process is, the better it is for the individual as well as for society or otherwise certain discontinuities and ruptures could occur which would lead to vast generational gaps and generational struggles.

It is largely the responsibility of society to facilitate this process, without commanding it, in order that youth get settled in society without any harm to the community and to themselves. If not, youth can easily become a tool of violent political movements of various natures that would aim at gaining political power at the expense of the society at large. What is necessary is to understand and address the natural processes of youth rebellion to avoid such a happening disastrous to the youth themselves.

It is apparent that there is no such conscious understanding of this process of youth unrest in the present Sri Lankan society, not to speak of measures or mechanisms to deal with it. What is at work instead is a long and rather oppressive process of absorbing youth into society that creates deep alienation and frustration among them. It is no wonder, therefore, why young tend to rebel in the process. As far as this survey is concerned, this rebellious nature is manifested in very clearly expressed anti-systemic views and attitudes towards politics and society. The anti-

systemic character is interpreted in this study as a tendency to reject the established system of politics and the society as a whole.

It is, however, not only the duration or the nature of the transformation process from childhood to adulthood that would lead to generational gaps or rebellion. As Lewis Feuer argued, "the environment" within which youth come of age is crucially important. In the 1960's, as he revealed in his classic study of *Conflict of Generations*, the environment within which the youth of that period came of age in many countries contributed to student and youth movements, and rebellion almost throughout the world (Feuer 1969). What could then possibly mean by the "environment" that would or would not determine a particular political behaviour or action of youth? It means not only the material or the socio-economic circumstances but also the mental or the psycho-political circumstances.

Youth in this country, both Sinhalese and Tamil, have been experiencing long standing deprivation due to restricted opportunities for higher education, pervasive conditions of underemployment and unemployment, particularly in the rural sector, and the lack of a social support system in their painful adjustment to the job market, family life or the society at large. All these are the products of slothful economic conditions determined by the particular nature of underdevelopment irrespective of the country becoming a part of the global market and globalisation. Added to this is the population pressure that produces larger cohorts of youth population in society. It is a well-established argument that rapid population growth with its increase of younger people in society could well engender radical youth movements and revolts. (Moller 1968). Sri Lanka is no exception to this phenomenon. Although the population growth rates in the country have slowed down in the last decade or so, the number of persons who enters the youth population is still high due to the previous high rates of population growth.

On the other hand, the disturbing psycho-political circumstances under which the youth come of age may determine many of the anti-systemic views and attitudes expressed by them on various issues of politics and society. It can be argued that what is relevant in contributing to anti-systemic views and attitudes is the sense of relative rather than actual deprivation, deprivation relative to one's expectations. There have been many psycho-political changes in the country under globalisation that have influenced the thinking, expectations and aspirations of the youth. The open economic system and the much talked about information revolution have raised expectations of the youth not only in respect of employment and higher living standards but also of politics, good governance, democracy, human rights etc. What youth have been experiencing when they enter society, however, is a dichotomy between their raised expectations and aspirations on the one hand and the day-to-day reality that frustrates and depraves those expectations on the other.

The purpose of the present study, therefore, is to explore the apparent anti-systemic views and attitudes expressed by the youth during the survey and to reveal many observable interconnections between these attitudes and their socio-economic, political and cultural conditions, also revealed by the survey. The study at the end is also directed at identifying certain broad policies to address the overwhelming political frustrations, grievances and rightful aspirations of the youth and perhaps to avoid a possible recurrence of a third youth insurrection in the country. The purpose of the study can be considered important at least in terms of the democratisation process of the country since the anti-systemic orientations of the youth have proved to be both problematic and dangerous with two youth insurrections and a nationalist war led overwhelmingly by the youth in the recent past.

3. Anti-Systemic Orientation

In respect of political attitudes and views of youth as revealed by the survey, there is a clear-cut and pervasive anti-systemic orientation, which is the main substance that the present study attempts to investigate and find answers to understand its existence. When the youth were asked, "Do you consider our society to be just," 71.2% out of 2,892 respondents categorically stated "No." Another 8.2% were not clear, either saying, "don't know" or remaining silent. Only 20.7% said, "Yes."

The insidious dissatisfaction of youth about the present status of the Sri Lankan society is substantiated by many other attitudes expressed during the survey. When youth were asked, "Do you have a high opinion about the political leaders in the country?" 81.4% stated "No," and only 18.4% said "Yes." It is true that the lack of "high opinion" about the political leadership does not necessarily mean the complete dissatisfaction about the political system or the society. Perhaps a modest opinion or a critical opinion about a political leadership may be more appropriate for a healthy democratic system.

However, the very high rate of negative replies revealed during the survey was significant and problematic. When other statements related to the political or the state system were taken into consideration, it was possible to observe a close connection between what youth considered the "unjust society" and the "low-legitimacy" of the political system.[14] Perhaps the "political low-legitimacy" may be the main root cause of the pervading social dissatisfaction, apart from the cultural and economic factors, which will be discussed later in this investigation.

[14] "Low-legitimacy" in this study is interpreted as the "lack of confidence" or the "low level of confidence" in the political system.

4. **Political Low-Legitimacy**

The "low-legitimacy" of the political system in the eyes of the youth was more and more revealed in the questions asked about the "level of trust" on various branches of the state and political system. This attitude in turn was a reflection of the high expectations of youth on good governance inclusive of transparency and accountability. If we first take the "level of trust" on the four important branches of the state system - the judiciary, the bureaucracy, the military and the police - the survey revealed the following pattern as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Level of Trust: State Institutions

	Military	Judiciary	Police	Bureaucracy	Average
Great Deal	41.6	38.9	16.5	8.1	26.3
Somewhat	43.8	47.2	56.8	60.8	52.2
Not at All	13.7	12.6	25.9	29.7	20.4
Don't Know	0.9	1.3	0.8	1.4	1.1

It is unfortunate to note that there was not a great deal of trust or only somewhat trust on either of the above branches: the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the military or the police. Comparatively speaking, the military entertained the highest rate of a great deal of trust (41.6%) as the table shows. This was perhaps for the immediate reasons of war, the possibility of relatives and friends recently enlisting in the army and the patriotic images surrounding the military created through the media. Next came the judiciary, rating 38.9% of "great deal of trust" and the lowest rating was for the government officials or the bureaucracy (8.1%). It is important to note that one quarter of the youth marked a complete mistrust over the police (25.9%) and the bureaucracy (29.7%).

The survey also revealed the level of trust of youth on the three divisions of institutions of the political system, namely the central government, the provincial

councils and the local government institutions. As Table 2 reveals, there was not a great deal of trust on the part of the youth on any of these governing bodies. The least trusted, however, seemed to be the provincial councils. Compared to both the provincial council system and the local government system, the youth seemed to entertain a better level of trust on the central government for various reasons.

Table 2: Level of Trust: Political Institutions

	Central Government	Provincial Council	Local Government	Average
Great Deal	11.5	8.0	9.1	6.2
Somewhat	66.0	66.9	67.5	66.8
Not at All	21.7	23.6	22.0	22.4
Don't Know	0.8	1.5	1.4	1.2

It is reasonable to argue that the trust in the state system is much more important than trust in the political system in terms of stability of a social system. It is perhaps natural, particularly for the youth, to be critical of the political system because, other than its institutional structures, a political system is mainly composed of politicians. For example, the mistrust of local government could be the result of the mistrust of local politicians rather than rejection of the local government system altogether as an institution. However, there can be other elements involved in the mistrust of the provincial councils. For example, the recent origin of the provincial councils, coupled with adverse propaganda by the media against the devolution of power, and the inefficiencies due to the lack of authority and resources to these institutions under the present Constitution could have conditioned some of the perceptions of the youth on the matter.

However, after taking all these factors into consideration, what was most disturbing was the high level of correlated mistrust of the state and political institutions. The average complete mistrust level for the state institutions (20.4%)

was not significantly different to the average complete mistrust level for the political institutions (22.4%). It can also be argued that "somewhat trust" was not sufficient in respect of state institutions (average 52.2%) for a stable and viable political system.

5. **Reasons for Low-Legitimacy**

There were no direct indications from the survey as to what led to the low-legitimacy in respect of state institutions such as the bureaucracy, the police and even the judiciary. However, there were ample indications as to why the youth distrust or are suspicious of political institutions and political leaders. It was clear from the survey that the low level of trust of political institutions sprang from the low level of trust of the political parties and the elected representatives as revealed in Table 3.

Table 3: Level of Trust: Political Parties and Elected Representatives

	Parties	**Representatives**	**Average**
Great Deal	4.0	4.1	4.0
Somewhat	47.8	47.8	47.8
Not at All	47.0	47.1	47.0
Don't Know	1.2	1.0	1.2

The youth perception of political parties and the elected representatives were very much the same. There was no great deal of trust on both, the average being merely 4.0%. Only 47.8% of youth somewhat trusted the political parties or the elected representatives. A similar number of youth (47%) did not trust the political parties or the elected representatives at all. These survey results corroborate with another particular answer to a question that we have already highlighted, why 81% of youth had no high opinion about political leaders?

One important consideration here is whether the negative perception of politicians among the youth emerged out of their high aspirations for "good governance" or whether it was part and parcel of a broader pessimistic attitude towards the society. If it were the first, it could be considered a healthy trait perhaps useful towards democratisation of the country. If it were the second, the attitude of the youth would reveal a major ailment in society with perhaps drastic consequences for the future.

6. **Social and Political Attitudes**

The political attitudes revealed by the youth during the survey seem to be closely connected or correlated to the social attitudes that they hold in general. When asked about the level of happiness in life, only 29% said that they were very happy, 9% of youth clearly stated that they were unhappy and a further 7% were not sure of their status.

The most natural attitude that should have been expected of the youth was confidence or optimism. Instead, the most prevalent attitude was somewhat melancholy or indifferent with 56% of youth saying that they are "fairly happy." It appears that the Sri Lankan men and women grow weary of life very early and the youth in general are a pessimistic lot. Perhaps the only cheerful generation of the society at present seems to be the very young children. The high rate of suicide among youth is another indication of the said situation that may be conditioned either by the socio-economic circumstances, socio-cultural conditions or both. However, apart from socio-economic circumstances, there are certain cultural conditions in our society that oppress the youth to a great extent, which produce negative and pessimistic attitudes towards life, society and politics in general. Let us examine certain other indicators of what can be called "youth pessimism."

When youth were asked "how do you see the situation of the country at the moment," 65% categorically stated, "It is bad." It was only 29% who said, "It is [barely] good." However, the answer was not necessarily regime related. There were around 54% of youth who favoured the current regime (in 1999). Nevertheless, they were pessimistic about the situation in the country! When they were asked, "How do you see the future situation of the country," 36% categorically stated, "It is getting worse." There is no argument that these pessimistic attitudes were fairly or largely conditioned by the socio-economic circumstances that the youth and the country face in general. These will be investigated later in order to identify the underlying causes for the most anti-systemic political attitudes of the youth that might even erupt in a rebellion in the future as in the past. However, the objective of our investigation at this juncture is towards identifying socio-cultural or socio-psychological reasons for youth dissatisfaction and frustration.

The pessimistic attitudes of the youth were also revealed when they were asked about their role models. After giving several possible role models in society, they were asked: "Is there anybody whom you see as a role model for yourself?" 79% of the respondents recorded that they did not have any role model. Only 6% recorded that they consider the father, mother, elder sister or brother as role models, showing a high degree of youth alienation within the family itself. Equally significant was their lack of confidence in teachers as role models for themselves. Only 2% recorded teachers as role models and with regard to politicians, it was only 1%.

7. **Socio-Cultural Conditions of Youth Alienation**

One characteristic of the Sri Lankan society, perhaps common to many countries in transition from tradition to modernity, is the slow assimilation of the youth into

its fold. The period of youth is a long one without much recognition, dignity or rights. The Survey under investigation defined "the youth population as those in the age group between 15 and 29 years of age." In many other countries, youth are grouped to be between 15 to 24 and no more. The definition of the Survey, however, corroborated with the perception of the youth themselves as to who constitute a youth. The Survey asked, "Up to what age would you consider a person as a youth.' Only 13% considered the youth being below the age of 24 while 57% extended the upper age limit to 29 years. There were many others who wanted to extend the upper limit further up reflecting the country's slow acceptance of youth into its society. The word *tharuna* in Sinhala, meaning youth, connotes the meanings of "immature" and "irresponsible" apart from the meanings of "fresh" and "new." It appears that there is a self-acceptance of "immaturity" by the youth themselves.

Another characteristic of the youth is in fact dependency. The survey asked, "Are you dependent on others for your basic material needs." 72% of the respondents said yes. When they were asked to specify on whom if dependent, 97% indicated the family. It is true that "almost half of the respondents belonged to the age group of those between 15 to 19 years and therefore naturally dependent on the family. However, the dependency was not limited to economic matters. As a male respondent of 24 years stated,

> *"In Sri Lanka youth cannot do what they want, go where they desire or watch any film they like. They are under the control of adults. I have to seek permission to go where I want and do what I want. Since we are controlled, we cannot build relationships, as we like" (Young Voices, National Youth Survey 2000).*

As the above statement reveals, even a 24-year-old does not consider himself to be an adult. He basically referred to parents as the adults. It may be correct that all

youth do not face the above predicament of direct control by the family. But it is a pervasive trend. As another male respondent of 18 years stated,

> *"Many of my friends do not have the kind of family life I am having. Parents are very pushy about their children's education. Parents control many of my friends" (Young Voices, National Youth Survey 2000).*

There seems to be a clear-cut generational cleavage between the youth and the older generation of parents and the authorities in society including politicians. The following were some typical statements in this respect from youth who were interviewed during the survey.

> *Relationship between youth and adults in my area is not close. That is because a majority of adults in this area are not educated.*
>
> *On one hand, the youth think what adults say is stupid. On the other hand, the elder people think that youth are a group that have incredible lot of fun and have no responsibility (Young Voices, National Youth Survey 2000)*

8. **Political Radicalism**

One of the significant political orientations of the youth perhaps came to be revealed when the question was asked about their favourite ideology. As the following Table 4 shows, 63% of the respondents favoured a communist/socialist ideology, quite different to the world trend and only 11% favoured capitalism.

However, it is quite questionable whether communism and socialism should be combined in the same category without differentiating them as Socialism in Sri Lanka is equated with a mixed economy and a milder form of political disposition than communism. Almost all the major parties have some form of adherence to

socialism and the country is called a "democratic socialist republic" in its constitution. Another factor is that there are other ideologies apart from communism/socialism and capitalism such as religious ideologies and nationalism.

Table 4: Favourite Ideology

Preferred Ideology	Preference %
Communist / Socialist	63
Capitalist	11
No Ideology	21
Other	5

It is also significant to note that 21% were not concerned about any ideology. However, the contrast between those who favoured a communist/socialist ideology and capitalist ideology was important. Considering the fact that the majority of the respondents had secondary education, it is not possible to say that the respondents were completely unaware of the concepts. The possibility is that they favoured communism or socialism as against the present status of the social system in the country, which they conveniently identified as capitalism.

In addition, there was a clear aversion towards the private sector in respect of employment. 53% of youth who were interviewed preferred employment in the public sector perhaps owing to job security and lenient working conditions. 25% also appreciated self-employment if opportunities were available. In contrast, only 20% preferred the private sector. The survey also revealed the reasons for this aversion. 54% of the respondents categorically considered the private sector to be discriminatory. This response also came within a context of the allegedly pervasive system of political patronage within the recruitment system in the public sector. It was the opinion of 49% of the respondents that the private sector favoured known groups and individuals well connected through family and elite networks. Another 20% thought that the private sector discriminates the applicants

from low-income groups and rural backgrounds whatever the qualifications and skills that they may have. Another 14% thought that there could be political discrimination within the private sector as well.

Perhaps linked to these perceptions about the existing society was the question regarding their attitude towards violence. The question asked was very clear and there was no ambiguity about it.

> *"People hold different opinions about struggle. Some people say that struggle, even when it leads to violence, is a proper method for people to fulfil their demands, while others say that struggle is not a proper method if it leads to violence. How do you feel? Is struggle leading to violence a proper method or not for fulfilling peoples' demands?"*

For the above question, of course 62% answered in the negative, meaning that they did not approve violence. However, it is significant to note that 31% of the youth answered affirmatively and indicated that struggle leading to violence is a proper method of achieving reasonable demands. If that percentage were a reflection of actual feelings of the youth, the total number who condones violence would be alarming and would exceed 1 million. Following this question, it was asked: "Some people say that the readiness of young people in Sri Lanka for violent struggle has increased over the last 5 years. What do you think? Has it increased or decreased?" 63% of the respondents were of the opinion that readiness for violent struggle has increased.

However, there were positive signs of ethnic accommodation on the part of the youth as revealed by the survey. 90% of the respondents agree that it is the responsibility of the government to protect minorities. While 44% saying that all groups need protection, 36% emphasised that Tamils may need special protection. Considering that 76% of the sample consisted of Sinhalese and only 15% Tamils,

the above emphasis on Tamils could be considered to be an extremely positive aspect of the youth viewpoints. Equally important was the emphasis they placed on a negotiated settlement. 74% favoured a negotiated settlement with the LTTE while only 16% supported the war effort. It may be the case that the Sinhalese youth felt some sort of solidarity with the Tamil youth in the North having considered the LTTE to be based mainly on the youth sections of the society.

9. **Economic Conditions**

It is possible to relate the anti-systemic views and attitudes expressed by the youth, including the tendency to condone violent means of struggle, to economic conditions and the relative deprivation emanating from those conditions. This is more significant when one considers the high aspirations expressed by them in respect to education. An overwhelming majority of the respondents of the survey, almost 95%, had some sort of secondary education and above. Over 70% of them aspired for further education. When they were queried as to what type of further education they aspire for, 37% of them indicated University education and only 9% preferred technical education and 22% vocational training. The remaining respondents had diverse aspirations still within the formal ladder of school and university education.

It is significant to note that 75% of the respondents came from the rural sector, more or less representing the population and the economic sector configuration in the country. Given the age distribution, 40% of them were still in school or engaged in other studies. Only 26% of the youth interviewed were engaged in any kind of employment. 15% of them were in casual employment. Those who seek jobs or are unemployed were about 30%. Apart from the actual unemployment, the problem of perceived or future unemployment constituted a significant facet of the thinking of almost all the youth. When they were asked about the main problems

they face in their area, 80% mentioned unemployment as the first problem and economic poverty was stated as the second important problem.

The particular frustration of youth seemed to come from two perceived or real factors. On the one hand, they perceived, rightly or wrongly, that the benefits of developmental efforts in the country are the preserve of those who are equipped with political power and power connections. On the question, "who benefits from development," 58% answered that "those with power connections benefit from development." On the other hand, among those who sought employment or occupation, 35% considered the lack of funds to be the main obstacle for self-initiatives in seeking business or other types of self-employment.

10. **Within a Vicious Cycle**

It appears that the problems of youth, particularly in the rural sector, are entrenched in a vicious cycle of poverty, inadequate access to education and training, lack of funds or capital for self-initiatives and lack of political influence to benefit from limited developmental efforts. There is no doubt that the large majority of youth come from the marginal sectors of society or the poverty belt although the present survey had not investigated directly about the class or economic backgrounds of the respondents. However, there were indications from the responses given that this was the situation.

There was significant frustration expressed among youth during the survey in respect of education. At least this frustration was considerable among one third of the youth who were interviewed. In response to the question whether schools provide a good education, 31% said no. When they were requested to identify their problems of education, 33% of them identified these with economic problems. On the other hand, although the youth aspired for more education, and more

particularly for higher/university education, they were also mindful of some of the stumbling blocks. When they were asked what they considered was necessary to improve life chances, 31% of them identified training and skills as of paramount importance.

There has been a general perception among the policy makers and others that even youth in the rural sector aspire mainly for white-collar employment and this is considered a major reason for youth unemployment. However, the evidence of the survey did not prove this assertion although the general orientation of education in schools is obviously towards training for white-collar jobs. At least 50% of the youth indicated their preference for agriculture, which is in fact a healthy aspect of their orientation. What they seem to highlight was the inability to make gainful employment within the agricultural sector itself because of the lack of capital, incentives or training. Within these circumstances of disadvantage and marginalisation, a particularly alarming factor was the alienation they felt from the political processes as discussed earlier in respect of their political opinions and attitudes.

11. **Conclusions**

The nature of political views and attitudes expressed by the youth during the survey could, to a large extent be explained through what is called the "frustration-aggression" theory. It can be stated that anti-systemic views could be seen as related and relative to the actual and/or perceived grievances and deprivations of the youth. As we have discussed and analysed in the text, the connections are obvious, close and even intermingled. For example, it was very difficult to separate from each other, the lack of trust in politicians, political institutions and the low level of legitimacy of the state institutions.

The connection between “frustration” and “aggression” also means that most of the political views expressed can be seen as largely emanating from the oppressive socio-economic conditions particularly of the rural youth. This does not, however, mean that the lack of opportunities for higher education or employment are the sole reasons why youth are disillusioned about the political or the social system and why they even condone violent struggles to achieve their demands. There can be ideological and other reasons for some of the specific anti-systemic views and attitudes expressed by them. It could be part and parcel of a particular political indoctrination that the youth are succumbed to both in the North and in the South. Although the results of the survey did not allowed us to investigate these reasons to a greater detail the possibility cannot be dismissed.

However, leaving the possibility as it may, our experiences of youth rebellions in the past and even at present direct us to highlight not only the objective or the socio-economic factors but also the subjective or the psycho-political and organisational factors as underlying reasons for the anti-systemic views that the youth have overwhelmingly expressed. On the other hand, the lack of confidence in politicians or bureaucracy were directly related to the perceived view of the youth that they are corrupt, abusive or ineffective in delivering the services to the community that they are supposed to render. These are definitely issues of good governance. The youth were airing their dissatisfaction about transparency, corruption and accountability within a context of deteriorating conditions of democracy in the country.

The anti-systemic nature of the youth, whether they emanate (1) from socio-economic grievances, (2) subversive political indoctrination or (3) the lack of good governance, is not a new revelation as a result of the survey that was reviewed in this chapter. The tendency became well known after the youth insurrection in 1971 and the armed conflicts during 1988/89. There had been many studies done on the

subject. Perhaps what is new about the present study is the uncovering of many facets of this orientation and most importantly the fact that these tendencies are still prevalent perhaps in a more acute form than before. The latter is politically alarming and the possibility of a third insurrection cannot be easily ruled out.

After the state-youth conflict during 1988/89, which took over 50,000 lives, there was a Presidential Commission appointed in 1990 to "inquire and obtain information in respect of disquiet, unrest and social discontent among a section or sections of the youth and the factors that have contributed to the existence and growth of such discontent" among other matters. The Commission produced useful and comprehensive recommendations after lengthy deliberations most of which have not yet been implemented. The main approach of the recommendations, however, was to address the grievances of the youth mainly in the socio-economic terrain. As it stated,

> *"Unless there is an urgent effort to alleviate suffering and arrest the denial of basic amenities and opportunities for rural youth, the cycle of violence is very likely to recur with even greater frenzy and cause an even more real threat to the survival of democracy and the spirit of freedom" (Report of the Presidential Commission on Youth 1990).*

There is no doubt that not only the socio-economic grievances but also the culturally oppressive conditions of the youth should be addressed rapidly, systematically and progressively if a third insurrection is to be avoided, particularly in the South. Within a context of persistent political and socio-economic grievances among the youth it is easy for extremist, violent or nationalist movements to re-emerge like in the past.

However, it is also necessary to emphasise that most of the attitudes of the youth revealed by the survey are related to the perennial questions of good governance and democracy in the country. Those issues need to be addressed not only through

socio-economic changes but also through public policy and political changes. It seems that youth in fact are requesting for a new political culture in the country from political leaders with a better system of governance, devoid of corruption, malpractice, abuse of power and nepotism.

References

Erik Erickson*, Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Norton, New York, 1968

G. Obesekera, "Some Comments on the Social Backgrounds of the April 1971 Insurgency in Sri Lanka," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 33 (3), May 1974.

Government of Sri Lanka, *Report of the Presidential Commission on Youth,* Sessional Paper No.1 – 1990, p. XIII.

Herbert Moller, "Youth as a Force in the Modern World," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 10, (April, 1968), pp. 237-260.

Lewis Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements,* Basic Books, New York, 1969.

Piotr Glinski, "Young Generation as a Medium of Social Change," in Jan Garlicki (ed.), *Youth and Political Changes in Contemporary World*, Elipsa, Warszawa, 1998, p. 31.